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Francisco A. Scarano

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The *Jíbaro* Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico, 1745–1823

FRANCISCO A. SCARANO

[The stock-raiser of interior Argentina] has no city, no municipality, no intimate associations, and thus the basis of all social development is wanting. As the land-owners are not brought together, they have no public wants to satisfy; in a word, there is no *res publica*.

Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants*¹

This Bishop, true incarnation of that French devil named Richilieu, has unleashed madness and barbarism in this city; the political order has been shattered and it is no longer possible to distinguish decent people from the riffraff. This morning they are celebrating the return of Avilés the Child from his trip through the channels and waterways [surrounding the city] . . . When festive carnival breaks out before everyone's eyes, the mask turns them all into equals—gentleman and commoner, lady and tramp, master and slave—a dreadful situation that is about to undermine the edifice of State.

Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá, *El camino de Yaloide*²

IN HIS CLASSIC INDICTMENT of the unstable and violent aftermath of Argentine independence, Domingo F. Sarmiento, the *criollo*³ writer and statesman, poignantly revealed the torment of Latin American elites at the moment of nascent nationhood. Sarmiento was torn between the desire to create a virtuous republic in his homeland and his disdain for the human ingredients with which, inevitably, such a nation must be built. Like other creoles committed to the liberal-republican redemption of their homelands in the first half of the nineteenth century, he suffered a continuing contradiction: his cherished citizenship was a European

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¹ *Life in the Argentine Republic in the Days of the Tyrants: or, Civilization and Barbarism*, Mrs. Horace Mann, trans. (New York, 1868), 17.

² Caracas, 1994. All translations from the Spanish by the author, unless otherwise specified.

³ The terms *criollo* and *creole* are here used to signify people of European parents or of full European descent, born in the Spanish empire.

construct, a concept fundamentally alien to the cruel realities of the pampas and far removed from the lives of the “brutish gauchos” who humanized its landscape.⁴ The liberal-republican ideal had to be, in these circumstances, reconciled with a social formation that depended for its existence and reproduction on the policing of multiple boundaries of difference—of class, race, gender, legal status, education, ancestry, religious customs and beliefs, and moral sensibilities. Adapting the liberal-republican ideal to Spanish-American realities proved exceedingly challenging because at its core lies a fiction of ethnic and cultural homogeneity; for the fancied liberal nation to cohere and survive, its members had to constitute a people with a shared culture and a common ground of identity.⁵

Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, and especially after the crisis of the Spanish monarchy that erupted in the wake of Napoleon’s invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1808, elite creoles throughout the colonies faced dilemmas akin to Sarmiento’s. Many abhorred any suggestion of community with the “revolting” creatures who harvested their crops, herded their cattle, dragged their goods across long distances, dug in their mines, and performed all kinds of menial tasks at their service. But such a response was far from universal. While some creoles sought to exclude the poorer elements in society from their political project, denying them full representation in the republics (projected or already in existence), others, especially among the empire’s structurally weaker groups, were considerably more ambivalent.⁶ While perhaps repulsed by Indians, blacks, and the variety of racially mixed groups called *castas*, these creoles were capable of discovering, constructing, or reaffirming common understandings and interests with plebeian groups.⁷ When used symbolically as part of a project to usher in new political conditions and perhaps even a new state, and led by an ascendant group long subjected to the arbitrary exclusions of an absolutist system, such commonalities could become fragments of an incipient—hence, partial and fragmentary—

⁴ The term “brutish gauchos” is aptly used by Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes to ridicule the attitudes of independence-era elites toward the roving inhabitants of the pampas, the rich Argentine grasslands of the Buenos Aires hinterland, and of other untamed spaces of the interior. Fuentes, *The Campaign*, Alfred Mac Adam, trans. (New York, 1991). For a fuller exploration of Sarmiento’s social and political views, see Natalio R. Botana, “Sarmiento and Political Order: Liberty, Power, and Virtue,” in Tulio Halperín-Donghi, *et al.*, eds., *Sarmiento: Author of a Nation* (Berkeley, Calif., 1994), 101–13.

⁵ For a brief but perceptive treatment of Sarmiento’s work in the context of Spanish-American liberal efforts at nation-building, see David A. Brading, *The First America: The Spanish Monarchy, Creole Patriots, and the Liberal State, 1492–1867* (New York, 1991), 621–47. Julie Skurski has insightfully commented on the “ambiguities of authenticity” that resulted from the clash between “a rhetoric of national progress and popular sovereignty” and the implementation and defense of “an exclusionary system of class and ethnic relations throughout the nineteenth century”; see Skurski, “The Ambiguities of Authenticity in Latin America: *Doña Bárbara* and the Construction of National Identity,” *Poetics Today* 15 (1994): 613. See also Anthony Pagden, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination: Studies in European and Spanish-American Social and Political Theory, 1513–1830* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), esp. 137–53; and Colin M. MacLachlan, *Spain’s Empire in the New World: The Role of Ideas in Institutional and Social Change* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988), 134–35.

⁶ For a penetrating analysis of the differing structural positions of Spanish-American elites at the time of the independence wars, see George Reid Andrews, “Spanish American Independence: A Structural Analysis,” *Latin American Perspectives* 44 (1985): 105–32. Ambiguity is the key to understanding the partial and problematic incorporation of the plebe into the national project; see Skurski, “Ambiguities of Authenticity.”

⁷ In this essay, the term “plebeian” refers indistinctly to the rural and urban poor.

ethnic identity, a proto-nationalism.⁸ In time, forms of self-identification crafted during the special circumstances of the independence era led to tropes that articulated lasting ethnic bonds between elite and plebeian groups. Like the carnival in Rodríguez Juliá's allegorical novel about Puerto Rican ethnogenesis, these tropes provided a discursive means to blur lines of social difference. They permitted some members of the society to imagine a broader community amid the sharp contrasts of race, class, and gender attendant on the native-born.⁹

In this essay, I seek to understand one case of creole self-identification and ethnic construction in Spanish America, that of Puerto Rico, during the pivotal years of the independence wars (1810–1825). The delineation of ethnic space was in this case based on the practice, common in many parts of the world, of elevating a mythologized peasant to the status of a national icon.¹⁰ Here, I trace the emergence of a specifically Puerto Rican trope of creole identity that equates a local ethnicity with a mythologized peasant type. The trope in question initially surfaced in a series of texts from the Spanish-American independence period in which writers disguised their oppositional politics behind a discursive mask, passing themselves off as native peasants, called *jíbaros* by contemporary island residents.¹¹ Although these writers came from a privileged group, at their inaugural moment as a class they were disposed to seize on plebeian customs, to uncover the subtle political meanings encrypted in them, to speak in a disdained and difficult peasant vernacular, and, most important, to identify their own politics vis-à-vis absolutists and other reactionaries with the maneuvers and strategies of everyday forms of popular resistance.

⁸ In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2d edn. (1990; Cambridge, 1992), Eric Hobsbawm discusses at length the multiple, historically contingent connections between linguistic and ethnic identifications and what he terms "popular proto-nationalism," broadly defined as preexisting "feelings of collective belonging . . . which could operate, as it were, in the macro-political scale [and] which could fit in with modern states and nations" (p. 46). For the analysis of the Puerto Rican case, it is worth remembering Hobsbawm's conclusion that while the existence of proto-nationalist identities "made the task of nationalism easier, insofar as existing symbols and sentiments of proto-national community could be mobilized behind a modern cause or a modern state," the two were not the same, and the existence of one does not "logically or inevitably lead into the other" (p. 77). For an application of the concept of popular proto-nationalism to pre-nationalist Latin American forms of self-identification, see Steven Palmer, "Sociedad anónima, cultura oficial: Inventando la nación en Costa Rica, 1848–1900," in Iván Molina Jiménez and Steven Palmer, eds., *Héroes al gusto y libros de moda: Sociedad y cambio cultural en Costa Rica (1750/1900)* (San José, 1992).

⁹ For a suggestive statement on the nation as an "imagined political community," see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (New York, 1991). For an insightful critique of Anderson's vision of the Latin American creoles as the first to imagine such a community "apart from the practices of domination," see Skurski, "Ambiguities of Authenticity," 608–11. The quote is from p. 609. In this essay, I use the term "trope" in the sense suggested by Hayden White, to signify a figure or metaphor that "[deviates] from literal, conventional, or 'proper' language use, [a swerve] in locution sanctioned neither by custom nor logic. Tropes generate figures of speech or thought by their variation from what is 'normally' expected, and by the associations they establish between concepts normally felt not to be related or to be related in ways different from that suggested in the trope itself." White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, Md., 1978), 2.

¹⁰ For a relevant comparison, see Uffe Ostergaard, "Peasants and Danes: The Danish National Identity and Political Culture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (January 1992): 3–27.

¹¹ For a discussion of the probable origins and diffusion of the *jíbaro* ascription, see below, p. 1414. My views on this matter differ slightly from those of other scholars; see in particular Antonio S. Pedreira, "La actualidad del *jíbaro*," in *El jíbaro de Puerto Rico: Símbolo y figura*, Enrique Laguerre and Esther M. Melón, eds. (Sharon, Conn., 1968), 7–24; and Augusto Malaret Yordán, "¿Por qué llamamos *jíbaros* a nuestros campesinos?" *El mundo*, January 23, 1932.

In assuming *jíbaro* pseudonyms or using peasant idioms and symbols as channels of political and social criticism, this island's creole writers participated in one of the earliest and most inclusive delineations of national identity in Spanish America. Their appropriation of an icon representative of an oppressed group, and the political project in support of which that appropriation occurred, contrasts with the cultural and ideological content and strategies of the independence struggles that were led, in most cases, by Spanish-American creoles during the late colonial and independence-war eras (*circa* 1763–1825). After 1810, insurgents in Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico, and other colonies typically justified and explained their quest for independence via their rightful descent from the earliest conquerors and, as such, claimed the lion's share of colonial power, wealth, and privilege.¹²

Most historians of Latin American independence concur in the interpretation that it was the Bourbon kings' violation of an age-old colonial pact with creole elites that laid the groundwork for these struggles.¹³ According to this view, in the late colonial period, Spanish-American creoles, resenting their slide into what John Lynch has called "second-class status" in the wake of Bourbon centralism, folded their attempt to reclaim their lost preeminence into a political identity—an identity, however, that ordinarily expressed itself in terms of an expansive pan-American consciousness, a belief in the creoles' natural rights to govern in the American continent. There were some notable exceptions, to which I will refer below; but it is a well-established tenet in the literature that the *americanismo* or Americanism of rebel intellectuals and strategists was not socially inclusive. Creoles who saw themselves as *americanos* (Americans) sought to distinguish themselves from the Spanish-born, whose claim to social superiority they challenged, as well as from blacks, Indians, and *castas*.¹⁴ In the patriotic rhetoric of these *americanos*, a bold line of social and cultural difference divided them from the other main groupings of the colonial equation: the resented if not always numerous *gachupines*¹⁵ and the masses, whose loathed phenotypes and suspect moral character placed them far below those entitled to representation in the new nations.

By contrast, Puerto Rico's *jíbaro* masqueraders staked out a common (if ambiguous and tension-ridden) identification with the peasant masses to distinguish

¹² David Brading correctly assesses this aspect of the political ideas of one of the most influential theorists of Mexican independence, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, who believed that a "social pact" had existed since the Conquest between the king of Spain and the conquerors. The rights accruing to the conquerors were inherited by creoles, whom he saw, in uncharacteristic fashion, as the children of racial mixing with Indians. See Brading, *First America*, 591–95.

¹³ "As a well-developed dominant class," argues George Reid Andrews, "the creole elites had reached a level of corporate maturity that produced growing frustration at their colonial status and resentment of Spain's presumption of the right to dictate how the New World would be governed." Andrews, "Spanish American Independence: A Structural Analysis," *Latin American Perspectives* 12 (Winter 1985): 105. Another historian, Peggy K. Liss, writes that a "growing sense of regional belonging incorporating a large element of patriotism was the frequent reaction to pressure from Spain or other American provinces" and that new periodicals founded at the turn of the nineteenth century "signalled the emergence of new elements of patriotic self-awareness habitual to creoles." Liss, *Atlantic Empires: The Network of Trade and Revolution, 1713–1826* (Baltimore, Md., 1983), 89.

¹⁴ John Lynch, *The Spanish-American Revolutions, 1808–1826* (New York, 1973), 18. The Bourbon reforms were a series of measures undertaken by Bourbon monarchs, particularly Charles III (1759–1788), to centralize imperial administration and make the colonies fiscally more productive for the crown.

¹⁵ In Mexico and other parts of Latin America, *gachupines* was a derogatory reference to the Spanish-born residents of the colonies.

themselves ethnically from other members of the elite while seeking to maintain the basic outlines of a colonial relationship.¹⁶ The masqueraders' acts denoted a form of creole patriotism that was particularistic, as it was fixated to the peculiar lifeways of the rural dwellers of a specific territory. While Spanish-American proto-nationalists often framed their political identity in the abstract language of violated creole privilege, the Puerto Rican trope that is the subject of this essay was *ambiguously* inclusive of the racially mixed peasant majority. In its embrace of a subaltern group—a once-despised peasantry—it bears closer resemblance, perhaps, to the adoption of Indian dress and idioms—the “White Indian” phenomenon studied by Alan Taylor—by settlers of northern Massachusetts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as part of the ideological arsenal they deployed in a dispute over land rights with more powerful, non-resident proprietors.¹⁷

In studying the actions of educated creoles who assumed a peasant identity (or who masqueraded as such) and in probing the cultural meanings of such actions, I do not claim to tell the story of how an essential Puerto Rican identity emerged at a specific moment, arising out of the “subjective potency of primordial attachments, like kin.”¹⁸ Students of ethnicity in general, and of a Puerto Rican ethnicity in particular, have often sought to pin down a specific national character or consciousness, a feeling of distinctiveness claimed to be the exclusive possession of a particular, territorially defined group and grounded in a common language, set of customs, or history.¹⁹ I do not believe that this is a fruitful approach to ethnic and proto-nationalist identities. In the best of cases, it results in fixed, ahistorical categories that conceal the complex, multi-layered, and often contradictory character of ethnic and cultural identification. At worst, it marks the consciousness and cultural expressions of individual groups as elements of a reified “national culture.” On the other hand, I do not wish to posit the creoles’ identity in a simple “instrumentalist” way, that is, as a creation rooted in a particular class position and fundamentally reducible to it.²⁰ Such an approach would ignore the profound

¹⁶ For a careful analysis of a Latin American creole elite’s political thought in the twilight of the colonial period, see Margarita Garrido, *Reclamos y representaciones: Variaciones sobre la política en el Nuevo Reino de Granada, 1770–1815* (Bogota, 1993).

¹⁷ Alan Taylor, “‘Stopping the Progress of Rogues and Deceivers’: A White Indian Recruiting Notice of 1808,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 42 (January 1986): 90–103; and Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1990).

¹⁸ G. Carter Bentley, “Ethnicity and Practice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 36.

¹⁹ Primordialist definitions of Puerto Rican ethnicity have been attempted on numerous occasions. See especially María Teresa Babín, *La cultura de Puerto Rico* (San Juan, 1970); Antonio S. Pedreira, *Insularismo*, in *Obras*, 2 vols. (San Juan, 1970), 1: 13–176; and Enrique A. Laguerre, “Sobre la identidad cultural puertorriqueña,” *Revista Interamericana/Review* 2 (1975): 182–87. In “Encuesta Postdata, memorandum: Juan Manuel García Passalacqua,” *Postdata* 9 (1993): 214–15, and again in “El humo se volvió llama: El fracaso de la americanización de los puertorriqueños,” *Claridad* 25, no. 2166 (August 12–18, 1994): 14–15, Juan Manuel García Passalacqua redefines Puerto Rican ethnicity along popular lines but assumes that there has been an unchanged “core” of defining cultural characteristics since the eighteenth century. For a contrary view, see Carlos Pabón, “El lenguaje de la diferencia y la nación imaginada,” *Op. Cit.*, *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas* 8 (1994–95): 7–10. For Latin America as a whole, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla has put forth the more nuanced version of a primordial conception of ethnicity; see especially *Identidad y pluralismo cultural en América Latina* (Buenos Aires, [1982]).

²⁰ Such is the approach taken by José Luis González in the influential essays contained in *El país de*

emotions and attachments evoked by ethnicity independent of its “natural” class contexts and would foreclose the margin of discursive ambiguity that I believe the case at hand displays. Rather, echoing G. Carter Bentley, I wish to move away from the instrumentalist/primordialist dichotomy to consider Puerto Rican ethnic self-identification as “anchored internally in experience as well as externally in the cognitive distinctions in terms of which that experience is ordered.”²¹ This approach calls for treating national self-definition as a continuous dialectic instead of a linear process. The mutually reinforcing processes of discursive production and class formation are viewed as constantly interacting with each other. Because of this continuous flux and redefinition, they cannot be viewed in isolation but must be historicized.

The highly contingent career of the identity trope whose origins and early history this article will explore reveals much about the dynamic, contradictory, and plural character of cultural identities.²² The Puerto Rican-as-*jíbaro* trope was initially tied to the politics of a historically young, ascendant elite; as such, it formed part of the arsenal that this group used to advance a particular socioeconomic and political—that is, class—project. At first, the cultural understandings needed to decode the masquerade’s politics were not transparent or widely shared. In the 1810s and 1820s—the period initially examined here—its meanings proved a bit opaque and difficult to decipher by those whom the masqueraders assumed to be the “natural” audience, that is, other constitution enthusiasts, among whom liberal creoles predominated, and their absolutist rivals, a group dominated by conservative Spaniards. But, in time, the masquerade’s intent became more widely understood, and the Puerto Rican-as-*jíbaro* trope assumed a key role in the liberals’²³ protracted

cuatro pisos y otros ensayos (Río Piedras, 1980); and by Jorge Duany in “Ethnicity in the Spanish Caribbean: Notes on the Consolidation of Creole Identity in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1762–1868,” *Ethnic Groups* 6 (1985): 99–123. Other examples may be gleaned from contributions in Angel G. Quintero Rivera, *et al.*, *Puerto Rico: Identidad nacional y clases sociales (colloquio de Princeton)* (Río Piedras, 1979). Although they have opened up fruitful avenues of inquiry, these studies make too mechanical an association between class and ethnic identification. For a critique of the instrumentalist version of ethnicity, see Philippe I. Bourgois, *Ethnicity at Work: Divided Labor on a Central American Banana Plantation* (Baltimore, Md., 1989). His critique is worth citing directly: “Even if we accept that ethnicity is only an expression of an infinite variety of ideological phenomena, we still have to explain its genesis. If we do not take refuge in a “dialectical cop out,” then we have to do away with the notion of a material and an ideal relationship and collapse the two irresolvable halves of the relationship into the same material social process. In other words, there is no either/or relationship between class and ethnicity; the two are part of the same process of struggle” (p. 226).

²¹ Bentley, “Ethnicity and Practice,” 36.

²² Narratives of identity serve to construct and mobilize groups for political ends. As a result, at any moment, there are competing narratives vying for attention. For a general exploration of this problem, see Denis-Constant Martin, “The Choices of Identity,” *Social Identities* 1 (1995): 5–20. An approach to Puerto Rican identity that recognizes this multiplicity is to be found in Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston, Tex., 1993).

²³ In this article, I make certain assumptions about political alignments in 1810s and 1820s Puerto Rico. The first is that the “literary masqueraders” were all liberals, since they expressly embraced the constitutional process. The second is that while some members of the creole elite were conservatives or royalists, most were in fact liberals. The third is that the conservative reaction within the island included a majority faction rooted in the peninsular-born oligarchy and sustained by commerce, the high bureaucracy, and the upper church hierarchy, and a minority faction that was rooted in the upper echelon of creole landed wealth. The association of “liberal” with “creole” often trickled into the liberals’ campaign propaganda, as when in 1823 the journalist José Andino Amézquita encouraged his liberal readers to vote for candidates born on the island; Lidio Cruz Monclova, *Historia de Puerto Rico*

struggle to fashion and solidify a Puerto Rican ethnicity, a proto-nation. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the trope had acquired the transparency and clarity necessary for its symbolic anchoring of the nation. Thus, when in 1849 Manuel Alonso published, under the pen name of *El Gíbaro de Caguas* (the *jíbaro* from Caguas—an agricultural town in the east-central part of the island), a collection of vignettes about customs (*cuadros de costumbres*) filled with rich imagery of Puerto Rican traditions, he donned the mask without complications or misunderstandings. Although the title of Alonso's vignettes was, significantly, *El gíbaro*, the customs described in the book were clearly not of rural plebeians but of the more privileged groups.²⁴

I suggest, therefore, that from its inception the identity trope was plastic and dynamic. The drastic political changes that followed the U.S. invasion and takeover of Puerto Rico in 1898 placed these attributes in bold relief. When U.S. domination subordinated the local elite to foreign capital and to a new colonial administration, its intellectuals and politicians exploded the original, utilitarian meanings of the *jíbaro* masquerade into an elaborate myth that identified the *jíbaros*, their phenotype now absolutely whitened and their culture made into the repository of a higher, patriotic morality, with the very essence of a Puerto Rican nation threatened by North American economic and cultural domination.²⁵ Under the relentless pressures of Americanization, the Puerto Rican-as-*jíbaro* trope, now part of an elaborate myth of the birth and essence of the nation, came to perform a key role in the insular elites' view of themselves and in the conception of their relations with native plebeians.²⁶

(siglo XIX), 3 vols. in 6 (Río Piedras, 1970), 1: (1808–1868), 144. For Cruz Monclova's assessment of the social composition of the liberal and conservative camps, see also p. 17. On the composition of the church leadership, see José M. García Leduc, "La Iglesia y el clero católico de Puerto Rico durante el período revolucionario hispanoamericano (1800–1830): Algunos ejemplos," *Exégesis* (Universidad de Puerto Rico, Colegio Universitario de Humacao) 1 (1987): 10–16.

²⁴ José Luis González has offered a convincing reading of *El gíbaro* that points out Alonso's impersonation of a peasant while clearly maintaining his privileged identity. See especially González, *Literatura y sociedad en Puerto Rico* (Mexico City, 1978). For an interpretation of Alonso that captures his ambivalent position as a "plebeian intellectual" and puts *El gíbaro* alongside earlier texts of a similar sort—including one of the poems that I look at in this essay—see Pedro López Adorno, "Descolonización literaria y utopía: El caso puertorriqueño," *Exégesis* 9, no. 25 (1996): 60–63.

²⁵ For a highly suggestive analysis of the "explosion" of the *jíbaro* myth, see Lillian Guerra, "Understanding Self, Community and Nation in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico: An Exploration of Popular and Elite Perspectives" (MA thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1994). In "The Gaucho in Argentina's Quest for National Identity," in David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch, eds., *Where Cultures Meet: Frontiers in Latin American History* (Wilmington, Del., 1994), 151–64, Richard Slatta has made a similar argument for the Argentines' reconstitution of the gaucho myth for the purposes of constructing a national identity.

²⁶ In the final decade of the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans of all classes and colors often show pride in, indeed, are prone to, defining their ethnicity in terms of a profound identification with the legendary *jíbaro* (*jibaridad*). This phenomenon of identification with an ideologically constructed "common man" has few parallels in the Caribbean or Latin America—a fact that correlates with, as it confirms, Puerto Rico's modern condition as a U.S. colony. For a reflection on present-day meanings of *jibaridad*, see Angel G. Quintero Rivera, "La música puertorriqueña y la contra-cultura democrática: Espontaneidad libertaria de la herencia cimarrona," *Folklore americano* 49 (1990): 135–67; and "The Rural-Urban Dichotomy in the Formation of Puerto Rico's Cultural Identity," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids/New West Indian Guide* 61 (1987): 127–44. Comparable cases that come to mind are those of Argentina already cited, and of Chile with the mythic figure of the *huaso*. See René León Echaiz, *Interpretación histórica del huaso chileno* (Santiago de Chile, 1955).

The following pages will frame the *jíbaro* masquerade of the early nineteenth century in the context of an evolving politics of liberal-creole subalternity and representation. I will begin with a brief look at three instances and a total of four texts published in political journals in which Puerto Rican creoles “wore” *jíbaro* masks, with the obvious intent of articulating a precise political message. The middle sections of the essay will go back to the eighteenth century in an “archaeological” search for the original meanings of the *jíbaro* ascription. In unearthing the earliest constructions of a *jíbaro* myth, this exercise will, I believe, put the masquerade of the 1810s and 1820s in proper cultural and historical perspective. For only by looking at the earliest available fragments of this myth will the conflicts and contradictions, and the multiple layers of meaning, that infused the creole liberals’ attempt at *jíbaro* impersonation emerge. Finally, in the concluding section, I will analyze the social and political conditions that, in the midst of the Spanish-American independence convulsions, drove some Puerto Rican creoles to represent themselves as uneducated peasants in a political performance that took the form of an ethnic, proto-national communion.²⁷ I will seek to explain the masquerade as an attempt to enclose the peasantry within the boundaries of the proto-nation while excluding other, less assimilable members of local society, in particular, slaves of African or island birth, free people of African descent, and a host of recently arrived foreign groups. I will also hold that, amid the conditions that prevailed during the Spanish-American independence wars, the *jíbaro* mask was a fitting vehicle for such symbolic inclusion. Putting on this mask, creoles seemed to embrace the politics of subalternity practiced by Puerto Rican peasants in their conflict-ridden relations with social superiors.²⁸

The analysis presented here holds significant implications, both interpretive and methodological, for historians of Latin America. For one, it reinforces the view that simplistic generalizations about the manner in which local identities were fashioned in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, and about the sentiments and ideas contained in them, are untenable. Evidence is here provided in support of the notion that embryonic creole nationalisms were not *all* conservative and elitist, though they certainly tended to be. As David Brading and Peggy K. Liss have observed, at the time of the independence convulsions, some Latin American creole intellectuals, particularly in Mexico, based their *americanismo* on the notion of racial difference from Spaniards. A few, like the Mexican Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, an important ideologue of independence, had even begun to conceive of

²⁷ It bears remembering in this context what E. P. Thompson said about class consciousness and class identity: “[Class] happens,” he remarks in the preface to his best-known work, “when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.” Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966), 9.

²⁸ In suggesting that members of a dominant class embraced a politics of subalternity practiced by peasants, I echo Fernando Coronil’s suggestion that we listen to the subaltern voice even among those deemed relatively powerful. “[Subalternity] is a relational and a relative concept; there are times and places where subjects appear on the social stage as subaltern actors, just as there are times or places in which they play dominant roles. Moreover, at any given time or place, an actor may be subaltern in relation to another, yet dominant in relation to a third . . . Dominance and subalternity are not inherent, but relational characterizations. Subalternity defines not the being of a subject, but a subjected state of being.” Coronil, “Listening to the Subaltern: The Poetics of Neocolonial States,” *Poetics Today* 15 (1994): 648–49.

themselves as the product of racial mixture (*mestizaje*).²⁹ The Puerto Rican example provides a different interpretive angle on this issue of how creole ideology meshed with collective identities. It suggests that creoles on the margins of empire had also managed to see themselves as taking part in cultural and political communion with members of the subordinate classes, even though such identification was riven by ambivalence and could be at the service of either reformist or conservative aims.

In the same comparative vein, the *jíbaro* masquerade of the 1810s and 1820s substantiates Stuart B. Schwartz's insightful distinction between proto-nationalisms that were forged in the colonial cores and those in the periphery. Noting that, in Brazil, capital accumulation, imperial attention, and "European-style institutions" were lacking in the more marginal areas, Schwartz asserts that these regions "tended to express their distinctiveness in action rather than in thought, and in them we must seek popular expressions of *mentalité* rather than an intellectual discourse on their sentiments." By contrast, he claims, it was in the core areas, showered with imperial attention and European institutional forms, "that a traceable tradition of colonial distinctiveness or self-awareness ultimately emerges, although belatedly, and eventually grows into a proto-nationalism."³⁰ When applied to the Spanish empire, the distinction between a highly stratified core (for instance, Mexico, Peru, or even, by the late eighteenth century, Argentina) and a less stratified periphery (for example, the eastern Caribbean, and with it, Puerto Rico) would seem to illuminate why a culturally informed proto-nationalist consciousness made its appearance in a place like Puerto Rico as early as the second half of the eighteenth century. There, social differentiation was comparatively slight in the early colonial centuries. Consequently, the more educated members of society perforce had more direct contact with, and knowledge of, their social subordinates and their culture.³¹ It was from such contact and its attendant knowledge that the material for the Puerto Rican-as-*jíbaro* trope would be so effectively assembled.

ON AT LEAST THREE OCCASIONS, in 1814, 1820, and 1822, liberal newspapers in the colonial capital of San Juan published reader submissions (a letter and three poems) in which the authors' disguise as local peasants formed the core of the intended political message.³² Writing about these episodes, literary historians have merely noted that they represent the first known published instances of the term

²⁹ Brading, *First America*, 595; Liss, *Atlantic Empires*, 85–98.

³⁰ Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Formation of a Colonial Identity in Brazil," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, N.J., 1987), 32.

³¹ This is an argument advanced by Duany, "Ethnicity in the Spanish Caribbean." Referring to early colonial Puerto Rico, Richard M. Morse has written that it "did not become a strongly organized society . . .," as "it lacked the fixed class distinctions, the urban and rural centers of social gravity, the pomp and pageantry, the sanctums of learning and faith, that characterize a traditional and layered society"; Morse, "Puerto Rico: Eternal Crossroads," in *New World Soundings: Culture and Ideology in the Americas* (Baltimore, Md., 1989), 203.

³² Here, I will discuss three instances of reader submissions that used the device of *jíbaro* impersonation. There are perhaps several others from this period. I am aware of a fourth instance, dating from 1820, in which a correspondent of *El investigador*, criticizing a proposal to revamp the judiciary at the local level, signed off as "El *gíbaro*." The reader evidently resided in the colonial capital, for he referred to the city as "here" and to the rural areas "out in the country." *El investigador*, no. 18 (August 18, 1820): 299–300.

jíbaro as it is used in Puerto Rico, that is, to denote a culturally and socially distinctive insular peasantry.³³ My interest in these items is not strictly literary, of course, but more broadly cultural-historical. For, upon close scrutiny, the impersonations reveal much about the way that certain people, who evidently occupied subordinate positions, laid claim to a new political order in which, after much discreet struggle and patient wait, they would finally enjoy coveted forms of power.³⁴

The first item was a letter that appeared in one of the earliest Puerto Rican newspapers, the *Diario económico de Puerto Rico*, a journal devoted to economic and agricultural issues. The *Diario* was edited by the newly appointed intendant, Alejandro Ramírez, a polished, impeccably enlightened crown official of peninsular origin.³⁵ The letter, dated April 30, 1814, appeared on the pages of the *Diario* almost two months later (June 17). It was so poorly written that, as editor, Ramírez had to tell readers about errors in orthography and vocabulary, which he remedied before publication. One presumes that the writer had no more than an elementary education, although one also gleans from various clues about his background that he occupied an intermediate social position. With the admonition about the editorial corrections, of course, Ramírez authenticated the correspondent's voice as a genuine representative of a more rustic portion of society.

In his angry letter, the anonymous writer wished to denounce a persistent abuse of power by local tax authorities. Times were difficult and hard currency so scarce that the government had been forced to print paper money as a temporary corrective. Paper was rapidly depreciating, though, and people were beginning to speculate with scarce silver coinage. Begging his readers' forgiveness for any grammatical errors ("for I am not a paper person" [*papelista*], he claimed), the writer vehemently protested the "unjust" practice of officials who collected taxes in specie but later recorded them as paper-money receipts. Revealing his renown in local circles and adding authority to his observations, he disclosed that the previous year he had held public (municipal) office, although he still regarded himself as "poor." He wished to apprise the intendant and the *Diario*'s readership of a pattern of abuses perpetrated by alcaldes. While he was not a smart man—thus the "doctors" (that is, lawyers) in the capital city must determine if his criticism should carry any weight—he could say with certainty that the alcaldes collected taxes and

³³ For a discussion of changing conceptions of the *jíbaro* peasantry, see Manuel Alvarez Nazario, *El habla campesina del país: Orígenes y desarrollo del español en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, 1990), 15–47. In *La poesía en Puerto Rico antes de 1843*, 2d rev. edn. (San Juan, 1981), Eloísa Rivera Rivera discusses the three masquerade texts from the standpoint of literary history. See especially 295–99.

³⁴ In the spirit of "New Cultural History," I view "culture" as constitutive of society, not just a reflection of it. On the New Cultural History and particularly the work of Natalie Zemon Davis, see Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse, "Introduction: Culture and Identity," in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800): Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, Diefendorf and Hesse, eds. (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1993), 1–15.

³⁵ Luis E. González Vales, *Alejandro Ramírez y su tiempo: Ensayos de historia económica e institucional* (Río Piedras, 1978); "Alejandro Ramírez: La vida de un intendente liberal," in *Diario económico de Puerto Rico (1814–1815)*, facsimile edn. (San Juan, 1972), vol. 1: 9–59. Although of liberal instincts, Ramírez was a career official who did not hesitate to openly pronounce for the absolutist Ferdinand VII when the king reinstated his absolute powers in 1814. On this episode of Ramírez's career, see Cruz Monclova, *Historia*, 1: 77, n. 3. For Ramírez's standing among Guatemalan creoles, see Mario Rodríguez, *The Cádiz Experiment in Central America, 1808 to 1826* (Berkeley, Calif., 1978), 19–21.

tithes either in silver coinage or in specie, but when they deposited said receipts at the treasury or paid the priests' salaries, they did so in paper money.

Many are the points that I have not made, and I will make on another occasion if I see that you pay attention to my ill-formed letters, for which you will forgive me, since I am not a paper person, and I only say naked truths, and if God wills it the right person will see them, and a remedy be found by whomever can deliver it; I don't go into constitutional matters, into questions of law that I do not understand, or into the consequences of such dealings for the poor, or the rich, since this is not of concern for country bumpkins like us, who only work as much as we can and obey our superiors, and stay quiet and suffer prejudices and injustices; until we are able, that is, to claim our rights before a more just and benign superior.

At the end of this admonition, the aggrieved correspondent signed off with the pseudonym of "The Patient *Jíbaro*."³⁶

It is significant for the purposes of this analysis that this letter, the first known example of *jíbaro* self-identification, is written anonymously by someone who claims to speak for the hard-working rural poor (whether he was or not). It is also noteworthy that the letter's overall tone delivers to the authorities a warning, thinly veiled behind a poor man's unassailable truth about the corruptions of greed and power. The *jíbaro* is patient for now, but will he remain so? The implication is that while a long-suffering peasant may seem willing to suffer abuses quietly, he is not unaware of them. He may appear passive in the face of arbitrary power, but he has recognized the illegal and immoral nature of such actions. Moreover, as in the peasant *décimas* or sung verses, riddles, and stories, collected by J. Alden Mason in the early twentieth century and recently analyzed by Lillian Guerra, the writer implies that those who, like himself, work hard—presumably as agriculturalists—are connected to a source of higher morality unknown to, and unreachable by, the leisure classes.³⁷

Six years later, during yet another instance of press freedom, a different sort of communion between an educated writer and the peasant majority was suggested on the pages of a fledgling liberal newspaper, *El investigador*. In June 1820, the paper published in one of its first editions a long, anonymous poem entitled "The *Jíbaro*'s Verses" (*Coplas del jíbaro*). Written in the uncultured idiom of the island's rural inhabitants and in a poetic form, the *décima*, preferred by peasants for songs of social commentary—now a part of Puerto Rico's prized folklore³⁸—the verses satirized reactions of island and peninsular conservatives against the reinstatement of Spain's liberal 1812 constitution. For the second time in less than a decade, Spanish liberals had thrust upon a reluctant Ferdinand VII a constitutional monarchy with a liberal-representative form of government. Following a military

³⁶ El Gívaro Paciente, "Lo que pasa en los campos," *Diario económico de Puerto Rico*, no. 41 (June 17, 1814): 351–53.

³⁷ Guerra, "Understanding Self, Community, and Nation," *passim*; J. Alden Mason, "Porto-Rican Folklore: Décimas, Christmas Carols, Nursery Rhymes and Other Songs," *Journal of American Folklore* 31 (1918): 289–450.

³⁸ There is an abundant literature on Puerto Rican folklore and specifically on the *décima* tradition. See Cesáreo Rosa-Nieves, *Calambreñas, decimario boricua: Motivos de la montaña y la ciudad* (San Juan, 1964); Pedro Escabí and Elsa Escabí, *La décima: Estudio etnográfico de la cultura popular de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, 1976); and María Cadilla de Martínez, *Costumbres y tradicionalismos de mi tierra* (San Juan, 1938).

uprising, liberals had returned the country and its more acquiescent colonies, like Puerto Rico, to the constitutional system so rudely dismantled by the monarch six years earlier.³⁹ Set against this precedent of monarchical reaction, the coup that in 1820 reestablished the constitution left liberals, both in the colonies and in the Iberian Peninsula, keenly apprehensive of the monarch's ability to strike back.

The poetic *jíbaro* satire, which had first circulated in manuscript form before the newspaper printed it, aimed to ridicule the conservatives' portrayal of the constitutional regime as sheer anarchy, a state of utmost social and political dislocation. The author, Miguel Cabrera of Arecibo—evidently a liberal, educated creole—camouflaged his attack on the conservatives' preposterous claims of anarchy and libertinism by making a rustic *jíbaro* sing a *décima* celebrating his total liberation from social mores and political constraints:

Vamos Suidádanos
jasta ei pueblo oi
poique tío Juan Congo
tocará ei tamboi.

Mire prima Sica,
múdeme ei lichón
que yo voy á vei
la Costitusion.

.....

Me han asecurao
con grande sijilio
que no pagaremos
ya nengún susilio.

.....

Que toos los presos
se echarán a juera
y que ya ca uno
jará lo que quiera.

.....

Usté pué si quiere
cuando está enfadado
pegalle a su paire
una bofetá

Y si usté á una mosa
la jecha á peidei
usté se va limpio
sin que le pleité.

.....

Let's go citizens
to town today,
because Uncle John Congo
will play the drums.

Look, Cousin Sica,
bring me the pig,
for I'm going to see
the Constitution.

.....

I have been assured,
with great circumspection,
that we won't be paying
the *subsidio*⁴⁰ any more.

.....

That all of the prisoners
will be set free
and that now each person,
will do as he pleases.

.....

You will now be able
when you are so incensed
to smack your father
on the face.

And if you take a young woman
and ruin her honor
you will now be able
to go scot free.

.....

³⁹ Inaugurated with great fanfare in 1812 as one of Europe's most modern charters of liberal monarchy, the constitution was annulled by Ferdinand only two years later, shortly after his return from his French exile.

⁴⁰ An income tax, recently instituted.

Mañana en ei día
mato mi lichón
para celebrar
la Costitusion.

Tomorrow, for sure,
I will slaughter my pig
to celebrate
the Constitution.⁴¹

Cabrera evidently sought to ridicule the reactionaries' claims that not only would political order be subverted but patriarchal normalcy as well. The two systems of hierarchy were, of course, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. With impunity, men would now be able to dishonor women of good repute, keep mistresses, offend their fathers and mothers—the father's authority was especially singled out in the poem—and, of course, not pay taxes or serve prison time for one's crimes. In this world of liberal bliss, men would be able to satisfy their basest instincts without having to face society's or the state's restraints and retribution.

Because Cabrera's satirical intent was not immediately evident to the liberal readership of *El investigador*, the publication of "The Jibaro's Verses" touched off a heated controversy. Several of the paper's next editions were filled with letters condemning the author's presumed anti-constitutional slant. Some correspondents, unaware of the satire, believed the verses to be "detestable," "subversive," "irreligious," and "a crime."⁴² A person simply signing off as "The Unknown" (*El desconocido*) concluded his reproaching letter with a couple of verses of his own—a sort of counter-poem:

Estos veisos, Cielo
son de un gran breibón
que no sabe apreciar
la Costitusion.
Si buen ciudaano
fuera sin disputa
no jablara tanto
el hijo de puta.

These verses, o Heaven,
are the work of a dolt
who cannot appreciate
the Constitution.
If he a good citizen
were without a doubt,
the son of a bitch
would not talk so loud.⁴³

⁴¹ For the text of the verses and a full discussion of the controversy that followed, see Antonio S. Pedreira, *El periodismo en Puerto Rico*, in *Obras*, 2 vols. (San Juan, 1970), 2: 51–59.

⁴² Julie Greer Johnson's perceptive analysis of the ethnic politics of satire in colonial Spanish America is worth quoting here at length, as it throws light on the misunderstanding of Cabrera's verses: "Although colonial satirists transgressed social, moral, and textual norms with artistic creativity and human perceptivity, their real effectiveness at challenging both officially codified discourse and the administrative system in the Spanish American viceroyalties ultimately rested on the competency of their readers. Their task was a complex one and more demanding than the reading required of a nonironic text, for example. In composing their work, satirists have not simply devised a metatext, or a reinterpretation of a previous text that may be accepted or rejected by the reader, but a mock metatext that compels its readers to formulate their own interpretation. Although satirists are adamant about the need for reform, they rarely provide the alternative means to achieve it. This open-endedness or atmosphere of ambivalence permits the participation of readers in the hermeneutic process to a considerable extent, and thus enables them to become one of the text's creators. Such ambiguity in the construction of the work also allows for the malleability of cultural identity in the New World. This entire cognitive procedure, however, is contingent upon the reader's knowledge and ability to relate the past to the present in terms of both social order and the structure of official means of communication. If readers fail to detect a work's irony, a crucial component of both satire and parody, they are not prepared to evaluate the critical dimension created by a double-directed text, and the satirists' carefully constructed critical space is lost. Under these circumstances the audience best prepared to understand colonial satire was composed principally of male Creoles." Johnson, *Satire in Colonial Spanish America: Turning the New World Upside Down* (Austin, Tex., 1993), 12.

⁴³ Pedreira, *El periodismo*, 54.

Furthermore, an editorial expressed alarm over the verses' capacity to prejudice plebeians against the new political order. The poem injured the peasants, the editors believed, for it misled them about the new politics; hence, *El investigador* saw a need to explain the freedoms that truly derived from the constitution. They decried the still-anonymous author as "the most libelous enemy that has yet surfaced on this island against the constitutional system" and his verses as "containing a poison ever more pernicious, for he has prepared them for the most naïve of people"—a reference to the peasantry.⁴⁴

Seeing that his satire had not hit home, Cabrera finally revealed himself to the paper. He admitted authoring the verses and explained their true intent. They were the product of a good, honest liberal who merely wanted to ridicule the conservative opposition. Relieved, *El investigador*'s editors offered him an apology for misreading the verses' message, and the controversy came to an abrupt end.

It is not difficult to grasp that more than a simple attempt to ridicule the political opposition was involved in Cabrera's choice of the peasant vernacular for his chiding of the conservatives. The *jíbaro*'s voice fulfilled several interrelated purposes, which Cabrera could not have easily attained without recourse to a fictive peasant subjectivity. For one, the *jíbaro*'s take on "the Constitution" provided an authentic island critique of the absolutist reaction, which was associated in the colonies with owners of the large commercial establishments, high clergymen, bureaucrats, and military leaders—all classes in which the peninsular-born elites were clearly in the majority. Cabrera's critique of the reactionaries passed the test of authenticity; his "ethnographically correct" verses were an unquestionably Puerto Rican contribution to the liberal-conservative contest.

Moreover, the device of allowing a *jíbaro*'s imagination to roam with the new political liberties as he saw fit must have sent chills up the spines of elites and officialdom. The *jíbaro*'s challenge to civil and ecclesiastical authority, and his questioning of patriarchal prescriptions, raised the troubling specter of a radically democratic understanding of constitutional freedoms.⁴⁵ This at a time when the colonial liberals' definition of the rights enjoyed by the popular majority was considerably more restrictive. Cabrera's *jíbaro* understood freedom as the total absence of annoying political and social constraints—constraints to which the majority of liberals readily subscribed. They were, after all, integral to current ideas about social control. The *jíbaro*'s framing of freedom as the total absence of compulsion resonated threateningly with the realities of a society in which, in at least a couple of crucial ways, most people did not conform to liberal ideals: they were not willing to sell their labor to others for wages, and they failed to practice the self-control in all phases of their private and communal lives that would lead to their moral redemption.

I will return below to this clash between the liberals' expectations of plebeian behavior and the resistant or transgressive actions of popular actors. It holds one of the keys to interpreting the identity-generating potential of elite impersonations of *jíbaro* peasants. For the moment, and before taking up the last instance of the

⁴⁴ Pedreira, *El periodismo*, 51–53.

⁴⁵ Rivera Rivera has already observed that "democratic ideas palpitate in [Cabrera's] coplas"; *La poesía*, 167.

masquerade, I wish to point out a third important feature of Cabrera's *jíbaro*'s verses. His use of *jíbaro* speech was deft and clearly denotes an attempt to draw a linguistic boundary between the *hombres de la otra banda* and those of *esta banda*—between the Spanish-born and the island-born of whatever race or social condition.⁴⁶ With some effort, Spaniards could perhaps decipher the peasantry's peculiar vocabulary and pronunciation. But only a well-trained ("ethnographic") ear could both understand and reproduce the garbled Spanish, with Taino and African words and accents, of the interior peasantry.⁴⁷ In faithfully reproducing the *jíbaro* vernacular, Cabrera, like the anonymous "Patient *Jíbaro*" of several years before, consciously chose to represent himself as of "these shores."

A third example of the masquerade appeared on the pages of another liberal newspaper, the *Diario liberal y de variedades de Puerto-Rico*, also during the second constitutional interregnum of 1820–1823. In April 1822, two anonymous correspondents exchanged poems in celebration of the recent implementation of an 1820 law that separated the office of the captain-general (the military command) from that of the civil governor. In the island colonial administration, the two functions had been combined since the late sixteenth century. Although delayed in its implementation, perhaps in recognition of Puerto Rico's military value to Spain, the measure was part of a decentralizing effort of the constitutional government that delighted liberals and further alienated the conservatives.⁴⁸ Like Cabrera in his *jíbaro*'s verses, the poets conveyed their joy over the new law in the peasant idiom, depicting two peasant families' reaction to the news of the long-awaited separation of civil and military powers.

In the first of the poems, a certain Primo Goyo el de Utuao (Cousin Goyo⁴⁹ from Utuado, an interior mountain town) gleefully announces to his family that the man they call "uncle"—a reference to the interim governor and captain-general, Colonel José Navarro—has announced the creation of a permanent militia. The women of the house, delighted with the news, quickly spread the word to other women and hence, not long thereafter, to the entire town. There follows a spontaneous celebration for which the peasant family's entire stock of birds is slaughtered:

Los diablos me arrebaten
 si Lionisia
No brincab y saltaba
 de contento
Y juntamentito que le jice
 ei cuento

May the devils take me with
 them if it is not true
That Lionisia, with such joy,
 jumped up and down,
And as soon as I told her
 the story

⁴⁶ The French linguist Emile Benveniste points out the importance of linguistic identity in the making of ethnic boundaries: "Every name of an ethnic character, in ancient times, was differentiating and oppositional. There was present in the name which a people assumed the intention, manifest or not, of distinguishing itself from the neighboring peoples, of affirming the superiority derived from a common, intelligible language. Hence the ethnic group often constituted an antithetical duality with the opposed ethnic group." Cited in John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), 5.

⁴⁷ Cabrera, incidentally, is the first in a long line of educated Puerto Ricans who would prove their membership in the "tribe," their intimacy with the culture, by using a stylized version of *jíbaro* speech, usually in writings of a socially or politically charged nature. Others include Manuel Alonso (*El Gíbaro*, 1849) and Manuel Fernández Juncos (*Costumbres y tradiciones*, 1883).

⁴⁸ *Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico*, Cayetano Coll y Toste, ed. (hereafter, *BHPR*), 8 (1921): 143; Cruz Monclova, *Historia*, 1: 127; Luis M. Díaz Soler, *Puerto Rico, desde sus orígenes hasta el cese de la dominación española* (Río Piedras, 1994), 398–99.

⁴⁹ Nickname for Gregorio.

Se lo engestó tuito á ma Maubricia.
 En cuantito lo supo ivá compaire!
 Se jueron de jilito á la cocina
 A yevaye las nuevas á su maire
 Tuitos los pavos, patos y gallinas
 Ha matao la vieja Catalina
 Y lo sabe en ei pueblo jasta ei
 Paire.

She fed it all to Maubricia.
 No sooner did they know, oh brother!
 Than they sped their way into the kitchen
 To bring the news to their mother.
 The old Catalina has slaughtered
 All the turkeys, ducks, and chickens
 And even the parish priest knows
 about it by now.⁵⁰

The second poem, which showed up in the *Diario*'s next edition two days later, tells the story of yet another peasant family for whom Cousin Goyo's piece of gossip, straight from the mouth of the colony's highest authority, bears equally good news. As Eloísa Rivera Rivera has remarked, this author was more accomplished than the first in his command of the peasant idiom.⁵¹ Furthermore, in making reference to various peasant practices—chewing tobacco, drinking coffee with molasses (*melao*), and slaughtering pigs on special occasions and festivities—he demonstrates a certain closeness to peasant culture that is reminiscent of Cabrera's. One also finds a reference here to the peasants' belief in "devils" who fulfill roles in people's daily lives and, as in Cabrera's verses, to a presumed peasant inclination for violence at the least provocation:

Avísale á tido Nino
 Que te tlaiga ei cuchinato;
 Yo demprovisie lo mato
 Y jaida á bajo me empino.

Ei viejo Juan Giripino
 Nos fiará ei aguadiente,

Busté cuíeme la gente;
 Y si alguno se aguellare,
 Delle sino fuere ei paire
 Un gasnaton bien caliente.

Go tell Uncle Nino
 To bring you the suckling pig;
 Improvising, I'll slaughter it
 And down a mountain slope I'll go.

Old Juan Giripino
 Will sell us *aguadiente* [a liquor] on credit,

You just watch over the people;
 And if anyone were to complain,
 Provided it isn't the priest,
 Give him a hard smack in the face.⁵²

This poem, even more than the first, firmly grounds the political reaction to the advent of civil government in a peasant culture that is genuinely "of this island." It is a peasant culture that possesses an essential wisdom beyond its apparent simplicity. Like their liberal counterparts among the elite, these peasants could decipher the much-anticipated political moment and grasp all of its liberating potential.

IN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE ETHNIC POLITICS of the masquerade, various large and small interpretive problems come to the fore. In the larger view, issues to grapple with include how a racially differentiated group of very poor rural dwellers came to be called "jíbaros" in the first place, what meanings were associated with that ascription initially, and how these meanings may have been molded and adapted

⁵⁰ *Diario liberal y de variedades de Puerto-Rico*, 2, no. 46 (April 15, 1822): 190 (*sic*), actually 170.

⁵¹ Rivera Rivera, *La poesía*, 298.

⁵² *Diario liberal y de variedades de Puerto-Rico* 2, no. 48 (April 17, 1822): 177.

before the political crisis of the Spanish-American empire and the first constitutionalist regime in Spain, in 1808 and 1812 respectively, and to what extent elites' and plebeians' perceptions of themselves were influenced by the evolving images that they harbored of each other. The smaller interpretive issue, to be taken up in the last section, is the question of the critical context of the masquerade: how events and conditions during the constitutional/liberal periods of the 1810s and 1820s helped the liberals' ethnic and political self-image cohere in terms of their commonalities with *jíbaros*.

The starting point for this discussion should be the *jíbaro* ascription itself. It is, after all, an explicit marker of two of the three instances of the 1814–1822 masquerade (the 1814 letter and Cabrera's verses). Scholars disagree on how and when it began to be used in Puerto Rico to denote the peasantry and on its precise etymology. For my purpose, it should suffice to note that, outside of the Puerto Rican context, the word has three essential—all sharply derogatory—uses: in Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, it is the name of an irrepressible Indian group (the *jívaros*, or Shuar) made famous in the colonial period for its effective resistance to colonial encroachment; in colonial Mexico, it was a racial category that signified the mixed offspring of Indians and Africans; and in Cuba and Santo Domingo, employed as an adjective, it has denoted since the colonial period the state of wildness in certain animals, especially dogs (for instance, *perros jíbaros* are undomesticated forest dogs).⁵³ That these various uses and meanings may in fact be interrelated and that the Puerto Rican usage may condense the qualities of Shuar indomitability, animal wildness, and racial transgression are propositions whose investigation falls beyond the scope of this essay.

The negativity associated with all of these meanings, however, clearly delimits the discursive field within which certain rural inhabitants of Puerto Rico began to be called *jíbaros*, most likely in the beginning half of the eighteenth century. Elites used the *jíbaro* label to describe the peasant population's itinerance and semi-nomadic existence, practices that, though grounded in the practices of swidden agriculture, were aggravated by a host of bureaucratic and legal obstacles to the smallholders' procurement of usufruct titles on land.⁵⁴ The peasants' penchant for "jíbaro-like" indomitability posed an especially acute challenge to enlightened political order and modernization. In 1809, one member of the powerful San Juan municipal council (*cabildo*) remarked of the peasants,

⁵³ *Diccionario general ilustrado de la lengua española*, Vox (1945; Barcelona, 1979), 905. See also the *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, 20th edn. (Madrid, 1984), which fails to include the Mexican racial connotation.

⁵⁴ Fray Íñigo Abbad y Lasierra, *Historia geográfica, civil y natural de la Isla de San Juan Bautista de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, 1970), 155; Francisco A. Scarano, "Congregate and Control: The Peasantry and Labour Coercion in Puerto Rico before the Age of Sugar, 1750–1820," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids/New West Indian Guide*, special issue, 63 (1989): 23–40; Juana Gil-Bermejo García, *Panorama histórico de la agricultura en Puerto Rico* (Seville, 1970). Sidney W. Mintz has referred to the "squatter peasants" of the Spanish Caribbean islands in the early colonial centuries, and he concludes that "the term [peasants] is only barely applicable" to them; "Caribbean Peasantries," in *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago, 1974), n. 55, 148–49. For an enlightening discussion of the "semi-nomadic" nature of this peasantry's agrarian practices, see Michel J. Godreau and Juan A. Giusti, "Las concesiones de la Corona y propiedad de la tierra en Puerto Rico, siglos XVI–XX: Un estudio jurídico," *Revista jurídica de la Universidad de Puerto Rico* 62 (1993): 351–579, esp. 464–65.

[It] is a rare one who stays put in one place for as much as one year, and some only stay a month, always vagrant, itinerant and without fixed abode, neither familiar with, nor observing, the conduct of a steady and hard-working farmer. They disguise their real behavior as much as they can, and through a series of thieving machinations, many of them have shown that, in addition to being harmful to an increase in population, and to an abundance of crops, they have turned into repositories of laziness and vice.⁵⁵

In the eyes of modernizing, rationalistic elites, then, the tactics of peasant survival seemed barbaric, conducive only to vagrancy, crime, and political paralysis.

Extant testimonies and representations of island society from the middle decades of the eighteenth century strongly suggest the emergence of a homogenized image of the rural inhabitants as undifferentiated *jíbaros*. For instance, the 1745 travel journal of Manuel Moreno Alonso, whose voyage from Spain to the New World included a stopover at Aguada, in northwestern Puerto Rico, included a telling observation about the people he encountered there: “[The] men who are called *gívaros* are mulatto-like [*amulatados*], and the women gypsy-like [*propriamente agitanadas*]; the latter only wear a shirt and a very long skirt because they go barefoot, and use shoes only to dance the *zapareado*, which they customarily do very well indeed.”⁵⁶ But although *jíbaros* like those in Aguada occupied a key social space in the lens of a casual visitor like Moreno Alonso, other eyewitness accounts from the same period suggest the existence of a competing image of island society. Nearer the center of colonial power, and specifically in the capital, San Juan, another “map” of social reality held sway at the time of Moreno Alonso’s passing reference to Aguada’s peasants. In the construct that urban elites held of their social universe, the peasantry did not yet represent Puerto Rican plebeians but, rather, existed as vaguely defined and distant outsiders. The weight of the evidence uncovered so far supports two interrelated hypotheses concerning the social map that dominated closer to the center of colonial power and the changes to which it was subject over the course of the eighteenth century. The first is that city-based elites initially configured or imagined their social space as a fundamentally urban arena, occupied by characteristically urban types. Their conception of society corresponded to the classic Iberian notion, in which “society was divided into various corporations, self-contained entities which in cooperation with each other maintained the health of society and the general welfare.”⁵⁷ In this corporatist social map, peasants were relegated to an obscure margin. The second hypothesis is that, during the course of the last half of the eighteenth century, this social imaginary gradually gave way to another in which rural subalterns came to occupy the critical, defining space. By century’s end, elites had reconfigured their map of local society to include, very much as its centerpiece, an ambiguous image of the rural population, an image layered with positive and negative meanings. This

⁵⁵ “Informe de Don Pedro Irizarri, alcalde ordinario de San Juan sobre las instrucciones que debían darse a Don Ramón Power, diputado por Puerto Rico ante las Cortes españolas para promover el adelanto económico de la Isla, Año de 1809,” in Eugenio Fernández Méndez, ed., *Crónicas de Puerto Rico, desde la conquista hasta nuestros días (1493–1955)* (1955; Río Piedras, 1969), 345–72.

⁵⁶ Manuel Moreno Alonso, “De Cádiz a Veracruz en 1745,” *Historiografía y bibliografía americanistas* 27 (1983): 17–41.

⁵⁷ James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge, 1983), 8.

layering of ambiguous and conflicting associations of peasanthood produced a discursive ambiguity from which, in time, the Puerto Rican-as-*jíbaro* trope could draw its effectiveness as a weapon in the creole elite's political arsenal.

A document that supports the first hypothesis, about the prevalence of a city-centered map of island society before the late 1700s, is the detailed account of feasts held in San Juan in late 1745 and early 1746 to mourn the death of King Philip V and celebrate the crowning of his successor, Ferdinand VI. As was customary throughout the empire, dynastic milestones called for the ritual affirmation of crown legitimacy and imperial social order. For weeks and even months, the city population engaged in what seemed like nonstop ceremony and festivity: solemn Masses, parades, carnivals, horse races, dances, and other performances. These occasions called for the keeping of highly detailed records of all public or official events; for, in forwarding the ensuing account (*relación*) to the imperial capital of Madrid, colonials formalized and renewed their loyalty and deference to the monarchy. On this occasion, the author of the official account, who identified himself only as a native of Puerto Rico, left an intricately detailed record of events in San Juan over a number of months. A careful examination of this document reveals a conception of the social order in which peasants and other rural classes were marginal and unimportant.⁵⁸ Except as I will note below, they were not, in fact, mentioned at all, either as participants in the parades and dances or as spectators. By contrast, church and state officials, merchants, artisans, free people of color, and the urban poor all occupied prominent positions in the quasi-corporate social order of the city vividly sketched by the anonymous creole author.

Anthropologists and historians of Europe and Latin America have suggested that highly ritualized performances of this sort can be understood as public reaffirmations of the social order or, alternatively, as occasions for the symbolic challenging or subversion of that order.⁵⁹ Viewed in this manner, it is significant that the only reference to rural subalterns in the 1745–1746 *Relación* is highly generic and nondescript. The sole representation of the peasantry appears in a theatrical parade of costumes that marked the most irreverent portion of the festivities (the *mojiganga*). Following a Spanish tradition, there was, at the end of one of the feast days, a “ridiculously attired” masked procession. It included the figures of Don Quixote, his imaginary lover Dulcinea, a giant, “the preposterous character of a cook,” a *vejigante* (a monster who teased festival-goers with the contents of a cow’s bladder, often urine or feces), and—at the very end of the procession—a *montañés*, or hillbilly. *Décima* verses pinned to the latter’s dress made repeated, ironic references to the peasant’s “mountain-bred nobility” (*idalgúia montañesa*).

⁵⁸ The full text of an anonymous account of the 1745–1746 feasts, written by a creole, is reproduced in the “Relación verídica en la que se da noticia de lo acaecido en esta isla de Puerto Rico a fines del año de 1745 y principios de 1746 con motivo de llorar la muerte del rey Felipe V y celebrar la exaltación a la corona de Fernando VI,” *BHPR* 5 (1918): 148–93. For another printed account of similar festivities a half-century later, see *Relación de las fiestas que en la proclamación del R. Rey D. Carlos IV ha celebrado la ciudad de San Juan de Puerto Rico en los días 17, 18, 19 y siguientes hasta el 28 de octubre de 1789* (Madrid, 1790).

⁵⁹ For a collection of suggestive essays on the social and political projections of public ceremonials and rituals in Mexico, see William Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French, eds., *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington, Del., 1994).

Angel López Cantos, who has studied these festivals extensively, expresses surprise at the characterization of the hillbilly in this 1747 account. Indeed, in the peninsular tradition of *mojigangas*, on which the Puerto Rican festivals were patterned, it was uncommon to find peasants among the bizarre characters of the parade.⁶⁰ But just as important as the existence of the peasant icon was the manner in which he was depicted. The figure of the hillbilly was generic and entirely non-referential. Only a year earlier, the Spaniard Moreno Alonso had instantly seized on the *jíbaro* as the distinguishing social type of the strange new world that Aguada revealed to the European traveler. But while an image of the *jíbaros* already existed "out there" in the real world of a semi-nomadic, more fluid Puerto Rico, the city's elite, hemmed in by the fortress city's massive walls, did not think it necessary in the 1747 parade to evince any of the hillbilly's ascribed cultural traits as part of their ritual reaffirmation of the social order; it could have been any peasant, from anywhere.⁶¹

In contrast to the obscure and individual peasant icon of the 1746 parade, evidence from the second half of the century suggests that the city's privileged families increasingly regarded dressing up as rustics to be a vital ingredient of their carnivalesque amusement. This evidence also suggests that these latter-day elite *capitalinos*' impersonations of peasants played to a public that now contained a fairly large number of rural plebeians itself. These sources therefore hint at the possibility that while the earliest representations were distant and non-referential, later versions denoted greater empathy and even intimacy between the revelers (well-to-do city folk) and the country folk that they chose to represent in carnival-like masquerade. One might say, echoing Victor Turner, that a trend toward a more emphatic and complex ritualized, if momentary and fleeting, inversion of the social order, or *communitas*, was in evidence in the eighteenth-century Puerto Rican carnivals.⁶²

A spectacle of this sort caught the attention of a visiting French naturalist, André Pierre Ledrú, when in July 1797 he arrived in the port city. Stumbling on what seemed to him a frenzied street celebration, Ledrú observed with a keen eye for social irony that "a multitude of country folk had arrived in the city for this celebration. Imagine three or four hundred gentlemen, masked or dressed in strange costumes, running frantically through the streets, sometimes alone, sometimes in small groups. Here, many fashionable youth [*petimetres*], dressed as paupers, amused the crowd with the contrast between their clothing and the rich bridles worn by the stallions they were riding."⁶³ The Frenchman's remarks

⁶⁰ On the *mojigangas* as part of Spanish popular festivals, see Javier Huerta y Calvo, ed., *Teatro breve de los siglos XVI y XVII: Entremeses, loas, bailes, jácaras y mojigangas* (Madrid, 1985); and Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, "Introducción general," in *Colección de entremeses, loas, bailes, jácaras y mojigangas desde fines del siglo XVI á mediados del XVIII* (Madrid, 1911), 1: no. 1, i–cccix.

⁶¹ The social distance between city folk and peasantry contrasts sharply with the closeness, even intimacy, that is ritually played out in this parade between officialdom, the white element, and the black and mulatto artisans. The latter command an entire day's celebrations, which end in a dance at the governor's palace. "Relación verídica," *passim*.

⁶² *Communitas*, María Goldwasser notes, for the Rio de Janeiro carnival, is "the domain of equality, where all are placed without distinction on an identical level of social evaluation." Cited in Victor W. Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1986), 132.

⁶³ André Pierre Ledrú, *Viaje a la isla de Puerto Rico en el año 1797*, Julio L. de Vizcarrondo, trans. (1863; rpt. edn., San Juan, 1971), 42.



Self-portrait of Luis Paret y Alcázar, a Spanish painter exiled in Puerto Rico in 1775–1776. In this early version of the *jíbaro* masquerade, Paret y Alcázar humorously portrays himself as a poor peasant in order to appeal for pity from the court. Courtesy of the Museo de Arte e Historia de San Juan, in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

underscore an obvious shift in both the scale of representation and its cultural meanings. In the fifty years since the first recorded festival ridicule of a “hillbilly,” the dimensions of the carnival masquerade had expanded greatly, from a lone

individual representing a nondescript "hillbilly" to perhaps several dozen at once more keenly representative of the island's own rural "paupers." In fact, as Ledrú does not talk about any other *mojiganga* figure or costume, it is possible that the entire parade was made up of horsemen passing themselves off as peasants.⁶⁴

But what of the changing meanings? An intent to ridicule was obviously present. But it stands to reason that other understandings of the relationship between a city-based—yet, now more than ever, landed—elite and the rural folk were entangled in the representation; that, in 1797, novel cultural and political meanings, in a Turnerian sense, were being negotiated between masqueraders and public.⁶⁵ In its symbolic inversion of social roles, the public spectacle of peasant impersonation witnessed by Ledrú during the St. James festival was probably not much different from the effect that Miguel Cabrera intended with his 1820 satire that misfired.⁶⁶

It is quite significant for my interpretation of the event's symbolism that the 1797 peasant *mojiganga* took place during the first St. James festival after Spanish and creole troops had repulsed a massive British invasion. This was doubtless the most successful military action ever undertaken on behalf of Spanish sovereignty in almost four centuries of Spanish rule in Puerto Rico. During the prolonged siege of San Juan, the island's militias, led by both peninsular and creole officers but staffed primarily with native troops (both *pardos*, or colored, and whites), provided the decisive margin of victory.⁶⁷ Creole pride in the accomplishments of local actors was riding high, then, when Ledrú entered the city three months after the lifting of the blockade. Such pride could well have encouraged the generalized elaboration of *communitas* witnessed by the visiting naturalist.

Other contemporary observations concerning modes of social interaction beyond the carnivalesque context point in the same direction. That the social leveling and identity-building effects of religious and civil rituals were not limited to San Juan or to officially sanctioned carnivals, horse races, and parades is suggested, for example, in another portion of Ledrú's account. On his expedition through the countryside, he observed with amazement how on one occasion different classes and colors of creoles shared in the enjoyment of a family feast. While visiting a sugar and coffee hacienda near the Loíza River, the scientist was struck by the intimacy of social

⁶⁴ Aníbal González regards Ledrú's testimonial of his botanical trip to Puerto Rico as a pivotal document in the country's history, since it captures island life at a moment of its initiation into modernity. See González, "La mar inédita: El *Viaje a la isla de Puerto Rico* de André Pierre Ledrú," *Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* 92–93 (1986): 59–65.

⁶⁵ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (London, 1969). In *Masquerade Politics: Explorations in the Structure of Urban Cultural Movements* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993), Abner Cohen argues, following Turner, that "[in carnival], through interaction in primary relationships and change of role in masquerading, individuals recreate their self-identity and so are enabled to resume their demanding social roles in ordinary daily life Although it is essentially a cultural, artistic spectacle, saturated by music, dancing and drama, it is always political, intimately and dynamically related to the political order and to the struggle for power within it" (pp. 3–4).

⁶⁶ Carnival mask and textual masks can have very similar social objectives, of course. For an approach to the use of masks in literature to "bring about . . . the changing of social class, the crossing of otherwise intransigent barriers of caste," see Laurence A. Gregorio, *The Pastoral Masquerade: Disguise and Identity in "L'Astrée"* (Saratoga, Calif., 1992). The quotation is from p. 10.

⁶⁷ For a brief account of the siege and the militia's importance in the victory, see Francisco A. Scarano, *Puerto Rico: Cinco siglos de historia* (San Juan, 1993), 360–63. See also José G. Rigau Pérez, "'Astonished at Their Bravery': El relato de un invasor inglés en Puerto Rico, 1797," *Revista de historia* (Puerto Rico) 7 (1988): 81–94.

intercourse that characterized a diverse group of Puerto Ricans as they celebrated the birth of the overseer's son:

The gathering consisted of forty to fifty creoles from the area, of both sexes. Some had come from as far as six leagues, because these men, who are ordinarily indolent, are quite prone to dancing. The mixing of whites, mulattoes, and free blacks formed a very original group: the men, dressed in Indiana shirts and pants, the women with white dresses and long golden necklaces, their heads all covered with colorful kerchiefs and round, laced hats, all successively executed African and creole dances to the sound of a guitar and the beat of a drum commonly called bomba.⁶⁸

Clearly, in Ledrú's eyes, the group's "originality" stemmed from the unexpected brew of phenotypes and cultural traditions, embodied in the origins of the dances and the musical instruments.⁶⁹

THUS THE BURDEN, OR NEGATIVITY, with which elites most likely loaded the term *jíbaro* in its earliest deployments is only part—one of several layers—of a more complex story. As the twilight of the eighteenth century approached, elite creoles had reason to feel proud of their accomplishments. Some of their achievements, like the 1797 defeat of the British invasion, had been attained shoulder-to-shoulder with their rural subalterns. They had attained others, like the promotion of coffee estates and other export-oriented farms, in spite of these same plebeians' resistance, as I will suggest in the next section. On balance, though, Ledrú's observations of the St. James parade and the Loíza gathering indicate that, by the end of the eighteenth century, the *jíbaro* icon had taken on an additional layer of meaning from that of sheer ridicule, which prompted earlier representations of rustics alongside allegorical, pathetic characters and animals. Now the distant ridicule coexisted with messages whose sign was more positive and whose effect was that of ethnic inclusion across the bold lines of class and color that rigidly separated island inhabitants from one another.

How can this suggestion of inclusiveness be firmed up? In an especially sophisticated essay, Gerald Sider provides some helpful clues. In studying the construction of American Indian ethnicities in North America, Sider outlines the relationship that holds between, on the one hand, the sort of discursive ambiguity that (I am suggesting) began to inform the *jíbaro* image and, on the other, underlying processes of social and economic domination. He notes that ambiguity—

⁶⁸ Ledrú, *Viaje*, 54. In another passage, the Frenchman, echoing Abbad and other eighteenth-century chroniclers, took pains to show that racial barriers were quite permeable and that it was common for white children to grow up in the company of slave children, a practice that led to "the utmost familiarity" between the races. Later on in life, however, these same whites would severely exploit their slaves. *Viaje*, 114.

⁶⁹ Although I disagree with Jorge Duany's vision of a fixed ethnic identity arising from certain features of the social structure, I believe he is correct in stating that one of the things that set Puerto Rico apart from Cuba as early as the final decades of the eighteenth century was the relative intimacy of social interaction between people of different race and class backgrounds in the former island; "Ethnicity in the Spanish Caribbean," 36. For another demonstration of the relative permeability of race and class boundaries in Puerto Rico, see Jay Kinsbruner, "Caste and Capitalism in the Caribbean: Residential Patterns and House Ownership among the Free People of Color of San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1823-46," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 70 (1990): 433-61.

the discursive coexistence of negative and positive images of the Other—in a dominant group's conception of its subalterns was intrinsic to colonial economic processes, especially in the American empires of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries:

The peculiar intimacy between dominators and dominated—from above, an intimacy that comes packaged with brutality and contempt; from below, an intimacy riven with ambiguity—seems particularly important to the historically unfolding process of domination and resistance, though perhaps more directly important to understanding resistance (and also nonresistance). It is in trying to unravel the interwoven paradoxes and ambiguities of this intimacy that we can most clearly see what seems to be the fundamental cultural contradiction of the process of domination by Europeans over native Americans: between domination as a form of incorporation, of bonding together, and simultaneously domination as a form of creating distance, difference, and otherness. Both resistance and collusion took their variant shapes within this matrix of incorporation and distancing.⁷⁰

This passage reveals that the exigencies of bonding and incorporation necessarily turn the dominators' vision from one that is filled with "brutality and contempt" into one that is much less disparaging and far more ambiguous. Only thus is the dominant group's relationship with the subordinate group normalized, the social hierarchy tentatively reaffirmed, and a "pact of domination" made workable, at least in the short term.⁷¹

Sider's formulation helps to frame the changing meanings of *jibaridad* ("jíbaro-ness") in the late eighteenth century, a period marked in Puerto Rico by an unprecedented increase in population, staple production, and maritime trade. Such demographic and material changes signaled the beginning of an era of increasing demands on the labor of peasants and slaves—and of stepped-up evasion of those demands by the rural poor. The closer in "peculiar intimacy" that elites and plebeians in the Puerto Rican rural scene became as a result of population growth and development of commercial agriculture, the more tension was generated between the negative and positive constructions of "the native," irremediably associated with country folk by at least the 1770s.

Nothing better illustrates this emergence of multilayered and ambiguous social identities than Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra's equivocations on how to represent Puerto Rican culture in the 1770s. Abbad is the author of Puerto Rico's first general history. In this magnificent chronicle of life on the island, one finds an irreparable conflict between two modes of conceiving island natives and the material and symbolic artifacts that made them distinctive. In one portion of Abbad's work, for example, the people of Puerto Rico are seen as a diverse bunch, made up of distinct

⁷⁰ Gerald Sider, "When Parrots Learn to Talk, and Why They Can't: Domination, Deception, and Self-Deception in Indian-White Relations," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 11.

⁷¹ The term "pact of domination," which comes originally from Nicos Poulantzas (*State, Power, and Socialism* [London, 1978]), has recently been recast into a theory of "hegemonic processes" by Florencia E. Mallon, in *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), 6–12. For a highly compatible view of the operation of hegemonic processes in the constitution of cultural "middle grounds," see Néstor García Canclini, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico* (Austin, Tex., 1993). He argues, "The ambiguous strategy of the dominant classes toward subordinate cultures can be explained by this twofold movement: a desire to impose their economic and cultural models on subordinate cultures and, at the same time, to appropriate that which they cannot destroy or bring under their control" (p. 171).

socio-racial "types": the standard groups of American-born whites, mulattoes, free blacks, and slaves. But in the next section, they are represented as bearers of a peculiar culture whose "customs" and "habits," eminently peasant-like and adapted to rural life, shaped a coherent and seamless whole.⁷² I contend that the ambiguities that crisscrossed Puerto Rican social identities in the 1770s constituted the cultural material on which the peninsular-born Benedictine rested these two very different standards or paradigms of social representation. By one of these yardsticks, he could talk of a richly hued kaleidoscope of social and racial differences; this was, for lack of a better term, the "traditional" way of depicting the social body in Spanish colonial, multi-racial societies. It was particularly "traditional" in the highly regimented, corporatist context of city life. By another yardstick, however, he rendered "the inhabitants"—the natives, now all lumped together into a single category of "creole"—as a people who possessed the Indians' indolence, frugality, disinterest, and hospitality, lived in huts, slept in hammocks, ate plantains from their own gardens, scavenged for land crabs, went barefoot, married young (often with people darker than themselves), and rode horseback with gusto and verve—in other words, a people whose defining traits were inextricably bound with the itinerant, troublesome peasants who had been called *jíbaros* for some time now.⁷³ Clearly, this latter model of a unique, comprehensive creole culture that could be best defined (or chose to define itself?) by the lifestyle of rural subalterns was the one struggling to be born in the Puerto Rico of the 1770s.⁷⁴

Abbad's narrative of the Puerto Rican-as-peasant permits a more nuanced analysis of how social identities were deployed and contested in the rapidly changing world of late eighteenth-century Puerto Rico. His constant allusions to a latent social disorder, menacingly announced by the peasants' restlessness and semi-nomadic existence, suggest a perspective on identity formation in this milieu that adds further complexity to the elite's problematic first embrace, or precocious incorporation, of the subaltern Other.⁷⁵ The coexistence of two almost contradictory meanings of *jibaridad* did not hinge only on the tension between bonding and exclusion that typifies social relations of production, nor on the patricians' admiration for their subalterns' bravery in battle. It also grew out of their

⁷² See Abbad, *Historia*, chaps. 30 and 31.

⁷³ Abbad's vacillation is of interest not only for what it says about an emerging conception of Puerto Rican society but because it is symptomatic of the tension in eighteenth-century European historical narratives, between a Thomist or corporatist view of society and a growing proto-national, liberal, homogenized view of "the people." Many late eighteenth-century chroniclers of Spain and Latin America were caught between these two conceptions. On the resonances of Thomist thought in colonial Latin American political and social theory, see Richard M. Morse, "Claims of Political Tradition," in *New World Soundings*, 95–130. On the emergence of a national history in eighteenth-century Spain, see Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton, N.J., 1958).

⁷⁴ The analysis pursued here resonates with Edward Brathwaite's conception of late eighteenth-century Jamaica as a place where, out of the tension-ridden but creative interaction of masters and slaves, Europeans and Africans, a creole culture was gradually being created. See Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford, 1971).

⁷⁵ In his description of the island and its towns, Abbad constantly refers to the need for land reform, which will allow peasants who are currently landless to put down roots and become productive citizens. His advocacy of land reform is couched in a discourse of social control: land redistribution will prevent the landless from endlessly moving from one place to another and will thwart crime. See Abbad, *Historia*, 154; also his *Viage a la América*, facsimile reproduction in *Boletín de la Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia* 5 (1977): 23–206.

knowledge—and fear—of the peasants' ability to step up their challenge to the forces of agrarian capitalism, which were beginning to turn Puerto Rico into a significant exporter of coffee, sugar, and tobacco. The experience of the later 1700s had underscored for creole landowners how difficult it would be to harness the peasants' labor in the new export-oriented estates.⁷⁶ For, as I have already noted, rather than submitting to the rigors of a new labor regimen, the peasants practiced what Michael Adas has called "avoidance protest," that is, flight and sectarian withdrawal as a means to escape the imposition of labor discipline.⁷⁷ As the forces of agricultural capitalism descended upon him, Puerto Rico's "wild man" defended himself as best he could with the tools of everyday resistance: foot-dragging, dissimulation, evasive maneuvers of various kinds, irregular work attendance, and many others.⁷⁸

From the observation that in the late 1700s peasants increasingly found themselves resisting attempts to harness their labor and curtail their itinerance, certain implications might reasonably follow for understanding the identity dialectic. One that I wish to underscore concerns how class tensions, born of the social relations of production, helped crystallize a common language of identity between elites and plebeians. As the tug of war over labor discipline intensified, the peasants may have conflictively assumed, in a partial and confrontational manner, a subaltern version of the *jíbaro* identity imposed on them by the powerful as part of the process of domination.⁷⁹ Regrettably, though, this point must remain a hypothesis for now. I have yet to unearth enough solid evidence to assess whether, in the second half of the eighteenth century, rural folk began assuming for themselves the *jíbaro* identity that the more powerful initially hurled at them "in brutality and contempt." For now, the analysis must rely, in large measure, on a conceptualization of how a dialectic of power and contestation helps to congeal ethnic boundaries; it cannot yet be supported by a reasoned sifting of primary documents. At this point, the best support that I can marshal of plebeian sensibilities and attitudes toward the powerful are stories and poems from the peasant oral tradition that scholars believe originated in the eighteenth century.

In trying to determine whether Puerto Rico's late eighteenth-century peasants came to consider themselves *jíbaros*, not, perhaps, as the wild men perceived by their dominators but as principled transgressors of rules they deemed unjust, one must first look to the comparative and conceptual literature. An especially suggestive framework for the case at hand comes from scholars associated with

⁷⁶ Scarano, "Congregate and Control."

⁷⁷ Michael Adas, "From Avoidance to Confrontation: Peasant Protest in Colonial Southeast Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (1981): 217–47. See also Adas, "From Footdragging to Flight: The Evasive History of Peasant Avoidance Protest in South and Southeast Asia," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 13 (1986): 64–86.

⁷⁸ I draw this insight from the growing literature on "everyday" forms of peasant resistance, which is singularly associated with the work of James C. Scott. See especially *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn., 1985); and "Protest and Profanation: Agrarian Revolt and the Little Tradition," *Theory and Society* 4 (1979): 1–38.

⁷⁹ Among historians of Puerto Rico, Fernando Picó has come closest to exploring the mentality of rural Puerto Ricans at the time of the launching of export agriculture, in the late 1700s and the first half of the 1800s. See especially *Vivir en Caimito*, the essays in *Al filo del poder*, and his seminal work on unappropriated smallholders in the coffee highlands of the mid-nineteenth century, *Libertad y servidumbre en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX (propietarios y jornaleros)* (Río Piedras, 1976).

Subaltern Studies, a journal dedicated to South Asian history. Contributors to this journal creatively mesh Antonio Gramsci, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and cultural studies into a singular approach to popular culture and popular—especially peasant—movements.⁸⁰

Entertaining the problem of how Indian peasants' identities coalesced and intersected with class consciousness, Ranajit Guha, one of the leading members of the Subaltern Studies Group, reminds us of the manner in which peasants appropriate their dominators' notions and images, deploying them as tools of opposition and struggle:

[It] is not by insurgency alone that the peasant comes to know himself. In colonial India a sense of identity was imposed on him by those who had power over him by virtue of their class, caste and official standing. It was they who made him aware of his place in society as a measure of his distance from themselves—a distance expressed in differentials of wealth, status and culture. His identity amounted to the sum of his subalternity. In other words, he learnt to recognize himself not by the properties and attributes of his own social being but by a diminution, if not negation, of those of his superiors.⁸¹

The key here is the proposition that subaltern identities often are cast from the same ideological material that the dominant and powerful use to ridicule and belittle, condemn and oppress. Because, as Sider has put it, domination is an ambiguous process, a form of creating distance, of othering, and at the same time of creating intimacy or bonding. Thus it has in its power the capacity to shape meaningful, core subjectivities. Ethnic and cultural boundaries are often shaped or congealed as a result of domination, but the consciousness of those inside such boundaries does not just mirror the dominant ideology, even though it may parallel it. On the contrary, subalterns learn to deploy the dominant's notions about themselves insofar as these notions help them resist the operation of power, while avoiding the impression that they are frontally resisting.⁸²

It is useful to frame in this manner a wealth of evidence from Puerto Rico's folk traditions that suggests a purposefully equivocal use of the preconceptions of the powerful in order to express subaltern resistance. I am referring to rural peoples' use of the term *jíbaro*, or the ideological constructs associated with it, to signify a person who, while appearing to be dumb, docile, and self-deprecating, actually possesses a higher wisdom, one that is potentially morally superior—though not necessarily so.⁸³ In an unpublished study of the self-image of popular actors contained in Puerto Rico's oral traditions of stories, riddles, and songs, Lillian Guerra concludes that these orally transmitted forms evince an unmistakable

⁸⁰ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies 4* (Delhi, 1985), 364–76. For a thoughtful summary and critique of the relevance of the Subaltern Studies paradigm to Latin American history, see Florencia E. Mallon, "The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History," *AHR* 99 (December 1994): 1491–1515.

⁸¹ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1983), 18.

⁸² Thus one is likely to locate expressions of such consciousness and identity in what James C. Scott has called the "hidden transcript" of popular contestation and resistance. See especially Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn., 1990).

⁸³ The popular refrain "El *jíbaro* sabe más que el diablo" (the *jíbaro* knows more than the devil) suggests one view of the peasant's wisdom that borders on a higher form of evil rather than good. In outwitting the devil, does the *jíbaro* not become a devil himself?

anti-establishment, even revolutionary, slant.⁸⁴ This characteristic, however, is almost always disguised in apparent submission to the powerful. Guerra analyzes a rich repository of oral literature and song, one that has always impressed scholars with its highly political, socially critical disposition.⁸⁵ Most of this material was assembled in 1914–1915 by J. Alden Mason of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Commissioned by the New York Academy of Sciences to survey Puerto Rican folklore, Mason collected, mostly from schoolchildren whose parents were illiterate, a very large assortment of stories, carols, *décimas*, and riddles. The riddles alone—800 in 1,288 variants—represent one of the largest Spanish-American collections of its kind.⁸⁶

In reading this mass of folklore for its social messages, Guerra uncovers a rich lode of class tensions that runs across a vast portion of island oral tradition. Employing James C. Scott's suggestion on how to read folk culture for evidence of a "hidden transcript" of resistance, she concludes that "the Puerto Rican case is one of many popular cultures in which [the] phenomenon of 'symbolic inversion' and 'world-upside-down-prints' figures prominently."⁸⁷ In much of Puerto Rico's folk tradition, the poor and maligned ultimately triumph over the rich and powerful. Such morally correct reversal operates, for example, throughout the numerous folk stories that feature Juan Bobo, a peasant child believed to be witless and idiotic but who invariably demonstrates a superior wisdom, especially in the presence of the more powerful.

The Juan Bobo stories are part of a "trickster-tale" genre that, in the face of a sharp power differential, often appears as a cultural production of the oppressed: slaves, peasants, and the like.⁸⁸ As Scott has suggested for the genre as a whole, trickster tales reveal the subalterns' deployment of a powerful counter-narrative to the masters' ascriptions of the subalterns as stupid, lazy, and even subhuman.⁸⁹ Puerto Rican trickster tales do not stray far from this general description. "No matter how insurmountable the challenge," Guerra writes of the usual Juan Bobo story line,

Juan always seems to manage ending up on top. While some of the stories are meant for their pure entertainment value and hold no discernible social message, a great many distinguish themselves for the anti-establishment forms of rebellion which they endorse. Some simply poke fun at accepted social mores while others personally ridicule the pomposity characteristic of representatives of elite institutions. In one story, for example, Juan inadvertently offends a priest in church after mistaking him for his brother. In another

⁸⁴ Guerra, "Understanding Self, Community, and Nation," 121–76.

⁸⁵ Students of island folklore have often noted how *décimas* and other popular expressions have served as vehicles for social commentary and criticism. See Escabí and Escabí, *La décima*.

⁸⁶ Mason, "Porto-Rican Folklore."

⁸⁷ Guerra, "Understanding Self, Community, and Nation," 114, quoted by permission.

⁸⁸ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 162–66. It is important to note that historians of literature date the emergence of these stories from the eighteenth century. See Francisco Manrique Cabrera, *Historia de la literatura puertorriqueña* (Río Piedras, 1969), 62.

⁸⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 162–66. For other interpretations of trickster tales as weapons of resistance, see John W. Roberts, *From Trickster to Badman: The Black Folk Hero in Slavery and Freedom* (Philadelphia, 1989); and Ropo Sekoni, *Folk Poetics: A Sociosemiotic Study of Yoruba Trickster Tales* (Westport, Conn., 1994).

story, Juan follows the town mayor's advice to kill flies wherever he should see them, [and ends up] swatting one dead right on the mayor's baldspot.⁹⁰

Few of these Juan Bobo stories refer to *jíbaro* qualities as such. One should perhaps not expect such direct allusions to one of the elites' most potent tools of domination. Yet scholars have always thought that the essential references in the Juan Bobo stories are just those qualities of obtuseness and hard-headedness that figure prominently in the ideological constructions of primordial *jibaridad*, besides wildness, transience, and happy-go-lucky mindlessness.⁹¹

THE PRECEDING ACCOUNT of how Puerto Rican elites constructed a *jíbaro* Other while entangling it in ambiguous or contradictory meanings, and the suggestion that, even before the end of the independence era, peasants themselves may have pieced together an identity that intersected dialectically and creatively with this multi-layered elite construct, allows a view of the newspaper cases of *jíbaro* masquerading from the 1810s and 1820s in a different light. This concluding section is a sketch of a political interpretation of these acts as instances in the construction of ethnic boundaries and a proto-national identity predicated on the meanings and idioms fashioned during the preceding six or seven decades. The essential issue to grapple with is, as I have already suggested, the political context of the masquerade: the conditions that pushed liberal creoles to impersonate *jíbaros*, to show off their command of their vernacular, and to appeal to the higher moral authority of peasant values.

In the rapidly changing conditions of this strategically important colony, so dangerously close to the turbulent Haiti—the first black republic in the world and a free nation built by former slaves—the essential political fact of the 1810s and early 1820s was the liberal creoles' understandable apprehension of following the Venezuelans' lead in a rebellion against Spain. As in the sister colony of Cuba, the maintenance of social order at a time of growing export agriculture and a booming slave trade was a paramount concern of Puerto Rican elites, regardless of political philosophy. A fast-increasing slave, free black, and *pardo* population;⁹² a heavy influx of political refugees from Haiti, Venezuela, and other Spanish-American colonies perturbed by the independence rebellion;⁹³ and stepped-up immigration of capitalists and skilled workers (of the latter, many of African ancestry) intent on promoting or servicing an expanding plantation complex—all of these coexistent conditions made the liberal elite quite wary of armed rebellion.⁹⁴ Such wariness compelled liberals to seek an accommodation with the metropole and maintain the

⁹⁰ Guerra, "Understanding Self, Community, and Nation," 127–28, quoted by permission.

⁹¹ José Ramírez Rivera, comp., *Los cuentos de Juan Bobo* (Mayagüez, 1979); and María Cadilla de Martínez, *Raíces de la tierra (colección de cuentos populares y tradicionales)* (Arecibo, 1941).

⁹² For a review of economic and population changes in this period, see Francisco A. Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800–1850* (Madison, Wis., 1984), chap. 1.

⁹³ Ivette Pérez Vega, "El efecto económico, social y político de la emigración de Venezuela en el sur de Puerto Rico (Ponce), 1810–1830," *Revista de Indias* 47, no. 181 (1987): 869–85.

⁹⁴ There were several independence-minded conspiracies in this period, but they did not amount to much. See, for example, Francisco Morales Padrón, "Primer intento de independencia puertorriqueña," *Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* 48 (1970): 16–26. See a fuller treatment of the

broad outlines of the colonial pact. Fear of slave insurrection, the destruction of property, disrupted maritime commerce, and an ominous "Africanization" of the population sealed their allegiance to Spanish sovereignty.⁹⁵

These fears notwithstanding, liberals were not about to sacrifice, *quid pro quo*, a host of anxiously awaited reforms: expanded trade freedoms and lower tariffs, a civil administration meaningfully constrained by an elective legislature, the curtailment of church power and the abolition of the ecclesiastical tithe, greater civil liberties, of which freedom of speech was paramount, broadened municipal prerogatives, and representation in the Spanish Cortes equal to that of peninsular dominions, among others.⁹⁶ In both the Puerto Rican and Cuban cases, liberal politics during the independence era hinged on the search for a precarious balance between a forceful condemnation of absolutism's "evils" and an emphatic endorsement of Spanish sovereignty.⁹⁷ Liberals became adept at a balancing game that required them to appear to conform to a royal authority largely delegitimized by events in both the Peninsula and Spanish America, while at the same time pushing for the overhaul of key portions of the colonial pact.

In pursuing an equilibrium between conformity and reform, the liberals played an intricate game of "reading," anticipating, criticizing, and deflecting a metropolitan reaction that, in the face of the colonies' cry for independence or even autonomy, displayed remarkable uniformity of opinion, despite the cleavages that separated constitutionalists from monarchists and liberals from conservatives.⁹⁸ The creole liberals' initiation into the world of competitive politics put them in a position of subalternity—a position that paralleled the peasants' and slaves' posture *vis-à-vis*

nineteenth-century independence movement in Juan Angel Silén, *Historia de la nación puertorriqueña* (Río Piedras, 1973).

⁹⁵ A thinly veiled message contained in an anonymous letter to *El investigador*, no. 11 (July 24, 1820): 186, under the title "Concluya [sic] el artículo del viejo español," underscores this fear and the propaganda uses for which it could be deployed. After an overview of the bad results of the independence wars in Venezuela, the author concluded that "Puerto Ricans need not be reminded of the dire end which the leaders or heads of the Venezuelan revolution have met, which proves that no one who stirs up popular commotions, in hopes of climbing to the top while altering [society's] structure, has ever enjoyed the fruits of his reproachable projects" (emphasis added). On the racial component of the upper classes' fear, see J. L. González, "El país de cuatro pisos," in *El país*.

⁹⁶ The best study of politics in this period is still Isabel Gutiérrez del Arroyo, *El reformismo ilustrado en Puerto Rico* (Mexico City, 1953). The liberal ideology may be gleaned from the *instrucciones* that in 1809 the island's five municipal councils gave to Ramón Power y Giralt, the colony's elected representative to the Spanish Cortes. The four known *instrucciones* are reproduced in Aída R. Caro de Delgado, comp., *Ramón Power y Giralt: Diputado puertorriqueño a las Cortes Generales y Extraordinarias de España, 1810-1812* (San Juan, 1969), 71-128; Cruz Monclova discusses their liberal tenor in *Historia*, 1: 24-28. For an analysis of the life and works of José de Andino, a leading creole liberal, journalist, and economist, see Luis E. González Vales, "José de Andino, economista puertorriqueño del siglo XIX," in *Alejandro Ramírez y su tiempo*, 79-144.

⁹⁷ On the social bases of Cuban loyalty, see especially Roberto Mesa, *El colonialismo en la crisis del XIX español: Esclavitud y trabajo libre en Cuba*, 2d edn. (1967; Madrid, 1990); and Franklin W. Knight, *Spanish American Creole Society in Cuba (1750-1840) and the Rise of American Nationalism* (Austin, Tex., 1988). For a more nuanced view of Cuban reluctance to pursue independence, see Pablo Tornero, "La reacción del 'poder' cubano ante el fenómeno liberal en España y América, 1790-1814," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 26 (1989): 137-56.

⁹⁸ Michael Costeloe has lucidly shown that the independence struggle in Spanish America prompted a uniform reaction across the Spanish political spectrum; see Costeloe, *Response to Revolution: Imperial Spain and the Spanish American Revolutions, 1810-1840* (New York, 1986), 6-11. For a similar view, see Edmundo A. Heredia, *Planes españoles para reconquistar Hispanoamérica (1810-1818)* (Cordoba, 1974).

their social superiors in the open-range ranches (*hatos*), *estancias*, and haciendas of the rural landscape. The colonial liberals' task was further complicated by contingencies beyond their control. One of these was the enduring economic and social prominence of colonial royalists and archconservatives, who wielded power on both sides of the Atlantic disproportionate to the number of votes that their side could marshal in colonial elections. Another was the fact that in Spain, as in the colony, the constitutional regimen did not translate into the wholesale replacement of "royalist" by "constitutionalist" high officials. In spite of the formal institutional changes ushered in by the 1812 constitution, the reenactment of a constitutional government in 1820 did not fundamentally change the colonies' high administrative offices or the identities of those who filled them.⁹⁹ That is why in Puerto Rico, a strategically important colony much coveted for its role in the counter-revolutionary campaigns in the insurgent South American colonies, the despised Salvador Meléndez remained as governor and captain-general from 1809 to 1820, through all the administrative and constitutional changes of a convulsed decade.

But perhaps no other factor in the power equation was more disturbing from the standpoint of the creole liberals—and more significant for understanding the political impulse behind the *jíbaro* masquerade—than the shifting ethnic composition of the elite itself. The second decade of the nineteenth century witnessed demographic and social changes that threatened to reduce the creoles' economic, social, and political standing and influence. Under the impact of heightened immigration of Europeans, West Indians,¹⁰⁰ and South American royalists, the elite became increasingly foreign in its composition. For several decades prior to 1810, immigrants and exiles had been arriving in Puerto Rico in significant numbers. They had come from the metropole, from the convulsed Haiti and Santo Domingo just across the Mona Channel to the west, and from other foreign colonies.¹⁰¹ After 1815, however, the trickle of foreign immigration became a flood. In that year, the Cédula de Gracias, a decree that struck down old restrictions on trade with foreigners and on slave imports, also provided numerous incentives for colonists with capital or skills. Many began to arrive immediately, and by 1820 sizable contingents of French, English, Germans, Italians, North Americans, and a variety of other nationalities existed in Puerto Rico.¹⁰² At about the same time, Venezuelan

⁹⁹ Costeloe, *Response to Revolution*, 16–17. In "Notability and Revolution: Social Origins of the Political Elite in Liberal Spain, 1800 to 1853," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36 (1994): 97–121, Jesús Cruz argues for an understanding of Spanish politics in this period as a struggle between different elite factions, not a "bourgeois revolution" as many others have held. His study of the uniform social origins of ministers in the first half of the nineteenth century, despite oscillations between liberal and conservative regimes, helps frame the continuity observed between Ferdinand VII's unfettered reign in 1814–1820 and the ensuing constitutional period.

¹⁰⁰ The term "West Indian" refers here to native-born émigrés from other Caribbean islands, many of whom were of partial or full African descent.

¹⁰¹ For the pre-1800 immigration, see Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean: A Study in the Decline of Spanish Exclusivism* (1952; 2d edn., Río Piedras, 1971); Ursula Acosta, "Notas sobre la inmigración germanica a Puerto Rico a principios del siglo XIX," *Revista de historia* 1 (1985): 139–45; María Dolores Luque de Sánchez, "Con pasaporte francés en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX (1778–1850)," *Op. Cit.*, *Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas* 3 (1987–88): 95–122; and José Morales, "The Hispaniola Diaspora, 1791–1850: Puerto Rico, Cuba, Louisiana, and Other Host Societies" (PhD dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1986).

¹⁰² Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery*, chap. 5; Rosa Marazzi, "El impacto de la inmigración a Puerto Rico, 1800–1830," *Revista de ciencias sociales* 18 (1974): 1–44; and Jorge L. Chinea, "Racial Politics and

royalists, fearing reprisals from the conquering insurgents, began to take refuge in the still-tranquil Caribbean colonies. The number who were exiled in Puerto Rico is not known, but it is believed to have been large.¹⁰³ This stream of exiles altered the ethnic composition of the elite—especially of the voting minority—as it heightened the political contest between liberals and conservatives. The latter were boosted by the royalists' arrival. But for the liberals, who in 1820 or 1822 could rejoice over the newly recovered constitutional liberties, the arrival of Venezuelans and other foreigners signaled the threat that, at the very moment of their likely political ordination, power and social prominence would be unceremoniously wrested from them.

As the second constitutional interregnum began in 1820, therefore, Puerto Rico's liberal creoles counted many fewer reasons to rejoice than in 1812, at the beginning of the first. Now they were being squeezed socially and politically by drastically changed local and global circumstances. The very composition of insular society and its fundamental power relations were being transformed by the emergence of sugar plantation agriculture, a stepped-up slave trade, and heightened immigration of privileged whites and of a less privileged but more numerous group of free people of African descent. The promises of civil guarantees and political enfranchisement now rang much hollower than eight years before, when there had been every expectation that the king would permanently heed the constitution and that the colonial administration would be liberalized for good, with a new breed of functionaries placed at the helm. In 1820, by contrast, the liberals could sense the uncertainty amid the euphoria. Creoles would now have to compete for political power with recently arrived royalist émigrés. They might be edged out of their preeminent social position by these same royalists and by the less numerous but potentially more powerful foreign immigrants with capital and plantation experience, whose main purpose in taking up residence in Puerto Rico was the establishment of sugar and coffee plantations operated with slaves. Along with local slaveowners of importance, these foreign immigrants-turned-planters comprised, in the creole liberals' eyes, a threatening slaveowning faction (*bando esclavista*), whose idea of the good society resembled prosperous but tension-ridden Santo Domingo before its revolution of 1791.¹⁰⁴ This was far from the model society to which the creole liberals aspired.

It is not surprising, therefore, that amid this complicated set of circumstances

Commercial Agriculture: West Indian Immigration in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico," ms. based on PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1994. After a thorough search of archival sources on immigration, Chinea estimates that about 5,400 foreign heads of family arrived in Puerto Rico between 1800 and 1850. This number does not include Spaniards, or persons originating in other Spanish colonies, or African slaves.

¹⁰³ Pérez Vega, "El efecto económico," *passim*.

¹⁰⁴ The designation of certain members of the landowning class as the "slaveholding group" underscores the existence of a debate within this class concerning the desirability of plantation slavery. Already in 1809, the liberal San Juan councilman Pedro Yrisarri had sounded the alarm over the perils of slavery, preferring instead a labor regimen that would discipline peasants into rigorous and constant work. See Yrisarri, "Informe dado por el Alcalde Pedro Yrisarri al Ayuntamiento de la Capital," in Caro de Delgado, *Ramón Power y Giralt*, 45–70. Sidney Mintz correctly interprets Yrisarri's discourse on slavery and free labor as an early antecedent of the forced labor laws enacted in ensuing years. Mintz, "Slavery and Forced Labor in Puerto Rico," *Caribbean Transformations*, 82–94.

some liberals felt compelled to express a special form of communion with the peasant majority. In donning the *jíbaro* mask, they sought to safeguard their moment of political triumph. The assumption of a *jíbaro* identity to express support for the constitution and for progressive measures like the separation of the top civil and military offices signaled the creoles' identification of their liberal political project with a distinctive ethnicity. The masquerade grounded this project in a uniquely Puerto Rican set of claims and sensibilities, pertaining to what the journalist José de Andino believed to be the 97 percent of the population for whom the island was the country of birth, the *patria chica*.¹⁰⁵ Or, put another way, the liberals' identity trope allowed them to claim that theirs was the truest, most representative, and most inclusive of the projects in contention. Significantly, by resorting to the symbolic reversal of identities with rural plebeians—a literary version of the by now customary expression of *communitas* in carnivals and other festivities—elite creoles could stake out such high political ground without having to resort to a radically democratic formulation of the people's rights.¹⁰⁶ Such an interpretation of the constitution had to be avoided at all costs, especially at a time when the society's racial and class rifts were being thrown open by the rise of plantation slavery and by immigration.

The political messages contained in The Patient *Jíbaro*'s letter and in the three 1820–1822 poems of the *jíbaro* masquerade lay for the most part on the texts' surface, despite the difficulty that some readers initially experienced with Cabrera's verses. From a vantage point nearly two centuries later, it is easy to see in them a means to express opposition to the arbitrariness of the colonial administration and, in one way or another, to indicate support for the constitutional regimen. But these texts contained less transparent messages as well, expressive of the politics of subalternity practiced by both peasants and some of their social superiors. Such messages lie discreetly in the authors' accurate ("ethnographic") representation of certain aspects of peasant culture, two of which seem especially meaningful: the deft reproduction of the *jíbaro* dialect—transgressive of honored Castilian language codes but full of wit and inventiveness—and of the forms of everyday resistance of rural plebeians, who in face-to-face contact with social superiors treated them with measured suspicion, concealing from them, whenever possible, their real motives and thoughts.¹⁰⁷ In a symbolic reversal of identities reminiscent of carnival masquerades, Miguel Cabrera and the anonymous writers of the *Diario liberal y de variedades*, while representing the peasants' transgressive cultural forms and their modes of everyday resistance vis-à-vis the more powerful, consciously assumed an equivalent condition of subalternity in relation to colonial authorities and the partisans of absolute monarchy.

In this sense, in the 1810s and 1820s, the *jíbaro* mask allowed educated creoles to qualify their oppositional politics. Theirs was a principled resistance, to be sure, but one that did not threaten the essential equations of the colonial order. In resorting

¹⁰⁵ José de Andino to the Diputación Provincial, November 29, 1820, in González Vales, *Alejandro Ramírez y su tiempo*, 114–27.

¹⁰⁶ The ridiculing of such a radical understanding of the constitutional order in Cabrera's 1820 *Jíbaro* verses indicates that the masquerade could be used to impugn the most extreme interpretation of liberal constitutionalism.

¹⁰⁷ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, *passim*.

to the peasant disguise, writers sought to safeguard and perhaps maximize certain advantages of their condition, without upsetting existing hierarchies. They made clear that theirs was not a frontal or destructive attack on the colonial system. Rather, in the manner of the peasants whose social symbolism had been progressively layered and centered in Puerto Rico during the eighteenth century, the masquerading creoles sought specific advantages without engaging in a revolutionary challenge of the existing order. In so doing, they unwittingly launched a key metaphor of Puerto Rican identity.

Francisco A. Scarano teaches Caribbean and Latin American history at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He is the author of *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800-1850* (1984) and *Puerto Rico: Cinco siglos de historia* (1993), among other works. His current interests extend beyond economic and demographic history, in which he specialized when he studied at Columbia University under Herbert S. Klein, to include the politics of cross-class interactions in the context of Caribbean slave and peasant societies.



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